TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS

CREDITS

CLASSIC TRAVELLER

Marc Miller

MONGOOSE TRAVELLER

AUTHOR
Gareth Hanrahan

EDITOR
Matthew Sprange

LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN
Katrina Hepburn

ILLUSTRATIONS
Sergio Villa, Alessandro Belgiovine, Alvaro Nebot, Alexey Rubakin, Alfredo Dosztal, Amy Wheeler, Anderson Maia, Brandon Barnes, Jonathan Torres, Josep Pérez, Miko Ybanez, Nikita Vaslchuk, Quentin Soubrouillard, Xavier Bernard

PROOFING
Charlotte Law

TRAVELLER INNER CIRCLE

Andrew James, Alan Welty, Colin Dunn, M. J. Dougherty, Rob Eaglestone, Sam Wissa, Joshua Bell, Maksim Smelchak, Geir Lanesskog, Christopher Griffen

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SECRETS OF SECRETS

The *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign is based on the Classic Traveller *Adventure 12: Secret of the Ancients.* This campaign delves into the dark past of the Third Imperium Universe and the legacy of a race of incredibly advanced and powerful aliens. Over the course of this campaign, the Travellers will see sights no human has ever dreamed of, meddle with powers beyond understanding, clash with secret factions within the Imperium and ultimately help shape the destiny of all Charted Space.

The campaign consists of 10 linked adventures. Each adventure should take two to four sessions of play to complete, so playing through the entirety of *Secrets of the Ancients* could take up to a year of gaming. There are gaps between several of the adventures where the Referee can insert other plots or side treks, prolonging the campaign even further.

At the start of *Secrets of the Ancients*, it is assumed that the Travellers know each other and have access to a ship of some sort – your typical band of heavily armed space traders and opportunistic rogues. The one requirement is that one of the Travellers needs to be related to, or connected with, a key character – Uncle Vlen Backett. This Traveller will be referred to as Vlen's Inheritor or simply the Inheritor and should be given Handout One before the first adventure begins.

This campaign starts on Regina, in the Regina subsector of the Spinward Marches. The year is assumed to be 1105. The Travellers are assumed to have their own ship; if not, then replace references to their own vessel with the passenger ship they arrive on.

UNCLE VLEN BACKETT

Some people are only at home when travelling and Vlen is one of these restless souls. He might visit his homeworld of Alell (in the Regina subsector of the Spinward Marches) for a few weeks or even a month or two, delighting friends and family with tales of distant planets and exotic cultures, but then the wanderlust would take hold once more and he'd be off again. He was a charming old rogue – more staid relatives might disapprove of him and his questionable, unreliable ways but he was every child's favourite uncle.

No-one was ever sure what Uncle Vlen did or if he was just a drifter amid the stars. Sometimes, he worked on tramp traders or signed on as a deckhand on freighters, yet he also dabbled in archaeology and journalism and... well, he never liked to talk about it but Vlen had quite a collection of firearms and could handle himself in a fight. He also had a lot of strange friends – mostly other space voyagers but he also received irregular communications from scientists, naval officers, corporate oligarchs, even high nobility. On at least one occasion, Vargr from outside the Imperium travelled hundreds of parsecs to consult with Vlen Backett.

Still, a man is entitled to a few secrets. Vlen's example may have inspired the Traveller to start travelling – maybe they even travelled with Uncle Vlen for a while.

If none of the Travellers come from Alell or a similar planet, then there are other ways to establish a connection to Uncle Vlen:

- One of the Travellers' parents moved from Alell to the Travellers' homeworld and Uncle Vlen sometimes visited between trips offworld.
- 'Uncle' is an honorific – he's an old friend of the Traveller (or the Travellers' family) but not actually related.
- Uncle Vlen saved the Travellers' life in the past; the Traveller now owes a debt to the eccentric old man.

UNCLE VLEN – THE TRUTH

According to scholars and historians, a race named the Ancients dominated known space for tens of thousands of years. These Ancients accomplished great works – they moved whole planets, built titanic machines and wonders, and even transplanted Humaniti from its original home of Sol to a hundred other worlds. They cared for the primitive Vilani; they uplifted the Vargr to sapience. Then, approximately 300,000 years ago, the Ancients vanished. It is speculated that they fled known space, or committed mass suicide, or were wiped out in a cosmic war – either a civil war between different factions, or in a clash with an equally super-advanced and even more mysterious species. Whatever the cause, the scholars all agree on one thing – the Ancients are dead and gone.

The scholars are wrong.

A few Ancients survived the final war – or, to be precise, the final war never ended. In the closing stages of that terrible conflict, whole stellar systems became casualties. The Ancients fought with weapons that could trigger supernovae and reduce planets to dust, that could corrode reality, self-replicate, or warp causality in horrific ways. The survivors are those who learned to hide from their foes. One-by-one, the last Ancients withdrew to hiding places like pocket universes, heat-shielded stations in the heart of stars or fortresses buried hundreds of kilometres underground.

The war is fought slowly and quietly now, invisible to the lesser races who think that this region of space is now theirs. The Ancients employ spies and agents who scour known space for clues to the location of a rival's hiding place. Imperial intelligence is dimly aware of these alien conspiracies but the tempo of the war is incredibly slow by human terms – a millennium is nothing to the Ancients.

Uncle Vlen was one of these spies, working for an Ancient known as Seven. In this role, he travelled the galaxy, looking for clues to the location of another Ancient's hiding place. He found a clue – and it got him killed.

GRANDFATHER (YASKOYDRAY)

The semi-mythical 'Grandfather' is one of these Ancient survivors. According to his account, he was a Droyne gifted with astounding intelligence and psionic potential, who lifted his species from primitive barbarism to the stars. He sired 20 children and they each sired another 20, and each one of these 400 Sons was almost the equal of Grandfather in intellect and power. For millennia, Grandfather developed new technologies and sought the meaning of existence, while his Sons pursued other projects.

Over time, Grandfather grew dissatisfied with his Sons, who proved to be less than reliable helpers in his work, and he resolved to wipe them out. The Sons resisted, triggering the apocalyptic war of the Ancients.

In the end, Grandfather withdrew from the war, creating a pocket universe to hide within. Most of his offspring were dead or had fled from this region of the galaxy; either way, his research could continue uninterrupted by petty concerns. The only potential threat was the return of one of the errant Sons – and he resolved to take precautions against that eventuality.

THE SURVIVING ANCIENTS

Less than 50 of the Ancient Sons of Yaskoydray survived the war and most of those travelled far beyond Charted Space. They have changed beyond recognition, as each followed a different path of scientific development. Some are still Droyne in body and mind; others uploaded their personalities to computer systems,integrated themselves with technology, engineered new forms for themselves or left behind the bonds of matter and now exist only as psionic entities. Each Son is a civilisation unto himself, with his own unique beliefs and technologies.

Some Ancients continue to research their own obsessions, hunting for a way to transcend reality or perfect some ultimate technology, hoping to make a breakthrough before they are found and destroyed by their siblings. Others focus their attention on constructing ever more perfect hiding places, believing that the best strategy is to wait out the war in isolation until the other Ancients have exhausted their resources. Still others have gone on the offensive, eschewing technological advancement in favour of firepower and hunters; if everyone else is wiped out, then the last Ancient survivor will rule the galaxy.

They continue to fight amongst themselves, using spies and agents to seek out their enemies, and manipulate events to suit their own incomprehensible schemes. A man suddenly butchers four total strangers… all important scientists researching new technology, and science is set back decades. A technician blanks whole sections of a newly received encyclopaedia; the next day he cannot remember what he did and the Imperial bureaucracy moves too slowly to notice that it now has no data on an interdicted system. A noble arbitrarily rejects an appeal by settlers for aid fighting an allergy plague and, within years, their world is again barren.

Some few agents of the Ancient Sons, sports with the ability to cloud men's minds, roam the Imperium (and indeed, all of Charted Space) searching for clues of Yaskoydray's location. Yaskoydray himself depends on robots (and artificial androids indistinguishable from humans, Vargr or others) and personalities roaming the nets searching out his Sons' agents. Yaskoydray and his Sons care little for other civilisations… they will not randomly hurt or help such societies but will elevate one if the result will help their efforts and destroy it if it will hurt a rival. These agents must be discreet; if they make too much 'noise' they would attract the attention of a rival Ancient. The age of wonders is passed – now, the war of the Ancients is fought more with silenced pistols and knives in back alleyways than with disintegrators.

The Sons intervene only rarely – the vast course of galactic history is irrelevant to them. For the most part, they do not care about the Imperium, the Zhodani Consulate or any of the races of Charted Space, other than dispassionately noting that Grandfather's experiments in uplifting lesser races have proved remarkably persistent.

But when one of their agents finds a clue that might lead to a rival's hiding place – why, then, that can stir even the most remote Son into action…

THE FAMILY ARCHIVES

Cheating death was one of the first tasks that Yaskoydray set himself. He and all of the surviving Sons have what are known as 'family archives' – methods for resurrecting the dead Ancient. Grandfather, for example, has cloning banks to produce new bodies for himself and uses his psionic powers to jump his mind into a fresh body when his original form is destroyed. Both Grandfather and other Ancients use different methods but the result is the same – killing the Ancient is useless unless you also destroy his family archive.

This is why the original war of the Ancients was so destructive – the attacker had to be sure of destroying his foe's archive, so shattering whole planets was the most effective method. The Ancients scorched and salted much of known space in their conflict.

SEVEN

Grandfather indexed his Sons rather than name them; they still use the original Droyne numbers assigned to them thousands of years ago. Seven is one of the Ancients who survived the war and is still active near the Imperium. He has a special hatred for Grandfather, nursed and fed over 300,000 years of history. He has pursued the strategy of offence; his agents are everywhere, looking for signs of the other Ancients and especially for Grandfather. Seven believes the galaxy must be united under a single will – his – in order to survive a hypothetical conflict with extragalactic invaders.

IMPERIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service is responsible for gathering intelligence on threats to the Imperium and they are dimly aware of certain… anomalies. They know there are conspiracies out there, mysterious organisations that might be crime syndicates, terrorist networks, weird cults or fifth columnists, whose ultimate goals are still a mystery. There are too many unsolved crimes and strange events for it all to be co-incidence but there is no discernible logic to the conspiracy's action. Of course, Imperial Intelligence is unaware that there are multiple Ancients conspiracies out there.

Gand Holcess has made these conspiracies his life's work. He is obsessed with bringing the mysterious networks into the light and has the tacit backing of powerful factions within the Imperium. While most dismiss Holcess's wilder claims as pure fantasy, he is close to the truth. He has identified Vlen Backett as a member of this galactic conspiracy and intends to capture Vlen and interrogate him. Holcess is aided by Arisa, his most promising field agent and a highly effective spy.

THE UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

There are an unusual number of Ancients sites in the Spinward Marches, especially in the Regina subsector. The archaeology department at the University of Regina is recognised as one of the premier public authorities on the Ancients (the Imperial Navy and Imperial Intelligence pursue Ancients knowledge for their own ends, as functional artefacts such as black globes can tip the balance of power between the Imperium and its rivals). While the university must compete with private collectors and megacorporations, it has managed to secure several Ancients artefacts and sites, and continues to excavate the Ancients ruins on worlds like Beck's World and Yori.

THE SECRETS OF THE ANCIENTS CAMPAIGN

The 10 episodes of the campaign take the Travellers on a journey from Regina to Alell and on to Boughene, all within the Regina subsector. Vlen Backett's final request gives the Travellers the clues they need to find an Ancients base hidden deep in the atmosphere of Boughene's gas giant, Komesh. From there, they travel beyond the bounds of our universe, into the pocket dimension created by the fabled Yaskoydray, Grandfather himself. Within the pocket universe, they learn some of the history of the Ancients.

Long-time Traveller fans familiar with the original *Adventure 12* module will recognise this outline – but the campaign does not end there.

Grandfather lied. There are other survivors.

1. BODYSNATCHERS

The Inheritor receives a message that Uncle Vlen has died on Regina; the Inheritor is obligated to travel to that world to collect the body for transport back to Alell and to deal with Vlen's outstanding business. It soon becomes clear that Vlen died under mysterious circumstances – he may have been murdered and the authorities are strangely unwilling to help (the Travellers do not know it yet but Vlen was under observation by a secret branch of Imperial Intelligence).

The Travellers discover that Vlen was in contact with a professor at the University of Regina. Professor Ujinka is an expert in archaeology and has a theory that certain Ancients technology cause static in the G communications band and that this could be used as a detection method for new sites. Apparently, Vlen was very interested in this research and even offered to fund the professor's work on Beck's World, half-way across the subsector, where the professor's research assistant Juni is working.

While they visit the professor, the Travellers are attacked by a pair of assassins using a robot drone and have to chase the would-be murderers – only for one of the assassins to vanish into a police aircar. The other assassin is left for the Travellers to deal with. When captured, the assassin claims to be working for a mysterious crime lord, Ven Yasha, who stole an artefact from Vlen.

The Travellers descend into the Regina underworld to find this Ven Yasha. They never encounter Ven Yasha directly but do manage to locate his secret headquarters. They sneak into Ven Yasha's operation and recover Vlen's belongings – including a set of data tapes and a mysterious statuette.

There is more going on here than the Travellers will initially realise. Ven Yasha was another of Vlen Backett's identities – he used the fictional crime lord as a front when operating on Regina. When Vlen realised he was being watched by Imperial Intelligence, he arranged for his own 'death' at the hands of his own men. He planned for the Travellers to ship his body back to Alell and never thought they would get involved in other matters.

2. HOMECOMING

The Travellers return to Alell, right into the middle of an awkward feud. It appears that Uncle Vlen was not popular with certain branches of the extended family and there is a dispute over some legal matters. There is also an undercover Imperial Intelligence agent there, Arisa, posing as Vlen's young fiancé and digging for information.

CONTACTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES, RIVALS

To weave your Travellers into the campaign, use these recurring characters as Contacts or Allies – or even Rivals.

Vlen Backett: Ideally, he should be an Ally or Contact for the Inheritor; he can also be a Contact for any former Scout, Merchant, Agent, Entertainer or Drifter.

Ven Yasha: A crime boss on Regina; he should be an Enemy or Rival but could also be a Contact for an ex-criminal or former Drifter.

Professor Ujinka: She is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Regina and can be a Contact for a Scientist, a Traveller who comes from Regina or one who studied archaeology.

Juni Volsang: Ujinka's research assistant; an expert in Ancients archaeology and something of a technical genius herself. She is a potential Contact or Ally for Scientists, Scouts or Drifters.

Gand Holcess: An agent of Imperial Intelligence, obsessed with conspiracies and threats to the Imperium. He is best used as a Rival for Scouts or criminals.

The Travellers are sent to Vlen's hunting lodge in the middle of the wilderness to find a copy of Vlen's will that he kept there. After dealing with some surprisingly dangerous local fauna, the Travellers can explore the hunting lodge, where they find a secret room in the basement. There, they find proof that Vlen was Ven Yasha, along with references to the origin of the statuette, which comes from a crashed ship in the Boughene system. Vlen believes that by using Professor Ujinka's research, it would be possible to sweep Boughene for signs of Ancients bases.

An Imperial ship arrives in system to arrest the Travellers on charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy. They have to flee, taking Vlen's scoutship and manage to escape Alell only by sheer chance – the Imperial vessel is distracted by *something…* (Vlen's Ancient master sent a ship to pick up Vlad's corpse and resurrect him).

3. THE HUNT

The Travellers are chased across the sector by the *Alahir,* an Imperial Intelligence vessel captained by Gand Holcess. They have several possible destinations – they can head for Boughene and hope that they can find the Ancients site there or travel to Beck's World and get the professor's research assistant to help them. They also need to stay one step ahead of Holcess's vessel, which is considerably faster and more powerful than theirs.

At Beck's World, the Travellers discover that the researcher, Juni, is somewhere deep within the cave system; to contact her, they have to explore the Ancients ruins and navigate the automated defence systems and natural hazards. While exploring the ruins, they come across a Droyne carving of a strange demon descending from the skies.

With Juni's help, or with some excellent rolls from suitably skilled Travellers, they can configure their ship's sensors to detect G-band distortions and detect Ancients sites. This leads them to the gas giant in the Boughene system.

If they travel to Boughene without a working detector, they can still find the Ancients site but it is considerably more hazardous and takes a lot longer. They need to sweep the entire system for G-band distortions and eliminate false positives.

Eventually, the Travellers discover something deep in the atmosphere of the gas giant…

4. DESCENT

The Travellers plunge into the atmosphere of the gas giant, braving gravity, intense pressure and high-speed winds, where they discover an Ancients structure (actually, a ship). Unable to return to orbit, the Travellers explore the Ancients ship. It appears to be abandoned but has become infested by dangerous predators who live in the gas giant's atmosphere.

The Travellers eventually find the ship's control system; entering the bridge activates the ship, which then rises out of the atmosphere. The control system is artificially intelligent but needs instruction from its crew. Waiting for them in orbit is the *Alahir;* Captain Holcess demands they stand down.

Then a *thing* emerges from jump space, right on top of the *Alahir*. It is a ship, yet not a ship that anyone has ever seen before – apart from some long-dead Droyne on Beck's World. It is an Ancients *warship*. The *Alahir* does not stand a chance and is blasted to dust with a single shot from the warship's death rays.

The Ancients ship that the Travellers are on shields itself within a black globe and demands instruction – should it fight, flee or self-destruct? The Travellers are contacted by the other Ancients warship – and it is Vlen. At least, it is a copy of his personality. He begs the Travellers to destroy the control system of their ship and surrender to his master. They might be spared that way…

5. OTHERWORLD

The Ancients ship creates a portal and slips through it into a strange new world. The Travellers disembark and explore their new surroundings. It appears that this strange alien world is largely abandoned, although the Travellers encounter the legacies of Ancients experiments – in one chamber, there is a colony of proto-Vargr living in caves; in another, a half-finished cloning machine; in a third, a tentacled thing and so on. Once, all the experiments were held in different compartments but the custodians are gone and now all the different species and genetically engineered creatures are spilling from one environment to the next.

After some exploration, the Travellers find a transportation hub but the door is sealed. They need to negotiate with the last custodian robot for access – it initially mistakes them for experiments but soon realises that they are visitors from outside and lets them into the hub. There, the Travellers discover that they are inside a small pocket universe containing three entire star systems.

The robot transports them to the core world, for an audience with Grandfather himself. Grandfather is an ancient Droyne; he meets with the Travellers but does not have much time to chat – he is busy building a superweapon. The ship that wiped out the *Alahir* was one of his Sons, another Ancient, who went down a very different developmental path to Grandfather. It is currently trying to break through the same portal the Travellers came through…

6. SECRET OF THE ANCIENTS

To further enlighten the Travellers, Grandfather explains his side of the story by telepathic transfer. For this adventure, the Travellers take on the roles of a coterie of Grandfather's advisors – lesser Droyne, super intelligent robots, uplifted Vargr and stranger things – and the adventure takes place over thousands of years of prehistory. The Travellers have to respond to the growing tension between Grandfather and the other Droyne, the divergence of their technologies and the repercussions of Grandfather's plan to transcend existence.

The Ancients war begins and the Travellers are given a series of tasks, such as protecting transplanted human cultures, defending against Ancient superweapons and prosecuting some of Grandfather's attacks. As the war grinds on, the Travellers learn that it has become a total war, a war of annihilation and that one-by-one, the other Ancients are being wiped out.

In the end, Grandfather withdraws to his pocket universe, to wait out the devastation.

This whole adventure is played in a freeform manner; thousands of years pass between scenes and the rules are largely ignored as the Travellers are acting through minions.

However, something more is going on in this adventure that the Travellers are unaware of – Grandfather is using the telepathic contact to prepare one of them as a carrier for a copy of his memories. The Traveller is being transformed into a cyborg like Vlen Backett. Grandfather knows that there is every possibility that his current body will be destroyed by the Ancient's attack and has a backup plan.

7. THE DEATH OF GRANDFATHER

The Ancient breaks into Grandfather's pocket universe. Grandfather unleashes his superweapon – which conspicuously fails to work. The other Ancient opens fire, annihilating Grandfather. The planet is overrun. Guided by one of Grandfather's robots, the Travellers must flee through another teleportation portal, heading for the third system in the pocket universe.

This system is home to a TL7 Droyne colony, used by Grandfather as pets and breeding stock. The Travellers are pursued through the portal by hunter machines. Their robot guardian is destroyed holding the hunters off.

The Travellers must escape the pocket universe. There is an escape system for the Droyne colony but the robot who was supposed to help the primitive Droyne escape just got blown up. The Travellers need to find and reactivate the Ancients escape hatch and then steal one of the Droyne's primitive spacecraft and head to the exit portal in orbit.

As the Travellers flee the pocket universe, it seals behind them. The Ancient is temporarily trapped.

The exit from the pocket universe returns the Travellers to Boughene. There, they are arrested by Arisa of Imperial Intelligence.

8. IN THE EMPEROR'S NAME

The Travellers are transported to a secret prison facility on the nearby world of Pixie, where they are interrogated. Arisa wants to understand what exactly happened on Boughene and the fate of the *Arahir*. The Travellers can either co-operate with her interrogations and ally themselves with Imperial Intelligence or escape the prison on Pixie.

The Pixie prison uses the hulk of a *Kirunir*-class starship, known as the Gash. The other inmates are all political prisoners. Escaping the ship takes immense ingenuity and good fortune. Co-operating with Imperial Intelligence is more fruitful, although the Travellers will have to roleplay extremely well to win Arisa's trust after the events on Alell.

Over the course of this adventure, one of the Travellers realises that something strange is happening to them. They intuitively understand technology, they have been surgically altered and bizarre memories are awakening in their brain. Some of Grandfather's mindstate has been imprinted onto the Traveller's brain. They learn that the Ancient trapped in Grandfather's pocket dimension will soon be destroyed by the collapse of the pocket universe – but that will not put an end to it. The other Ancient has a backup, just like Grandfather. This backup must be destroyed before the pocket universe collapses, otherwise the Ancient will be reactivated from his backup.

There is one more revelation – the 'superweapon' Grandfather used on the rival Ancient was not designed to destroy his foe. It was a mind scanner and now Grandfather knows where his rival's sanctum is – it is in the Gvurrdon sector. Grandfather was only able to pick up a few scattered images, so the Travellers will have to travel to Gvurrdon and piece together the clues there.

9. THE DARK GATE

On their own, or with the Imperium's backing, the Travellers travel to Gvurrdon, braving the threat of the Vargr. They must bargain with Vargr leaders for access to their space and then scour the planet for signs of the Ancients base that must be there. En route, Grandfather leads them to a cache of Ancients personal weapons and armour on Pixie.

The Travellers are not the only agents of the Ancients on the planet. Other servants of the rival Ancient, including a copy of Vlen Backett, are searching for the Travellers.

As they search Ancient records and uncover the truth behind the Vargr myths, the Travellers have to defend themselves from assassins wielding Ancients weaponry.

The Travellers eventually discover that the Ancients base is located in the deep ocean. They travel into the depths and pass through another portal into another Ancients pocket dimension.

10. GRANDFATHER LIES

The Travellers discover that the other Ancients pocket universe is a nightmare realm of murderous machines. The Ancient who built them believed that only a galaxy united could defend itself and conquer other hostile races, that war and conflict was the inevitable fate of all life. He believed the Primordials must still be out there, somewhere, and that the Ancients and their servants could survive only by forming into an army. His pocket universe is a training ground for his dreams of conquest.

Using the memories of Grandfather, the Travellers can disarm some of the defence systems but they will have to fight their own way past the outer sentries. They must also choose which of the Ancients paradigms they support – the other Ancient's call to eternal warfare or Grandfather's detached, manipulative science.

AFTER SECRETS

The events of *Secrets of the Ancients* may change your *Traveller* universe forever, or the Ancients may vanish without a trace once more. There are many ways to follow on from the campaign, whether you treat it as a setting-shattering event or a once-off brush with the Ancients.

WORKING FOR IMPERIAL INTELLIGENCE

By the end of *Grandfather Lies*, the Travellers have learned more about the Ancients than anyone else in the Imperium. If they are still willing to work with Arisa, they can become Imperial agents searching for other Ancients networks and defending the Imperium against their manipulations. Proof that the Ancients are not only still extant but actively meddling in galactic affairs would send shockwaves all the way from Zhodane to the Iridium Throne.

ANCIENTS TECHNOLOGY

There are several opportunities for the Travellers to pick up Ancients artefacts over the course of the campaign and in *The Dark Gate* they are given Ancients weapons and armour to give them a chance of surviving the conflict with Seven. Grandfather can remove or deactivate any troublesome artefacts as he leaves; alternatively, items can run out of power or mysteriously cease to function at some future point. Ancients technology is millennia beyond that of the Imperium, so repairing an artefact that has ceased to function is nigh-impossible.

Possession of a functional Ancients device is a crime in the Imperium, as all such artefacts are the property of the Emperor by law. The Travellers may be given special exemption if they are working for Imperial Intelligence or they can sell their items on the black market or go on the run. Often, Ancients relics are more trouble than they are worth.

GRANDFATHER

And what of the elusive Yaskoydray himself? After the events in *Grandfather Lies*, he psionically transmits his mindstate to another hidden refuge, where he has another family archive. Grandfather's grand experiment will continue, now that another impediment has been eliminated.

Alternatively, the Travellers could become agents of Grandfather, just as Vlen Backett served Seven. They would seek out signs of other Ancients and work to eliminate them lest they interfere with Grandfather's experiments.

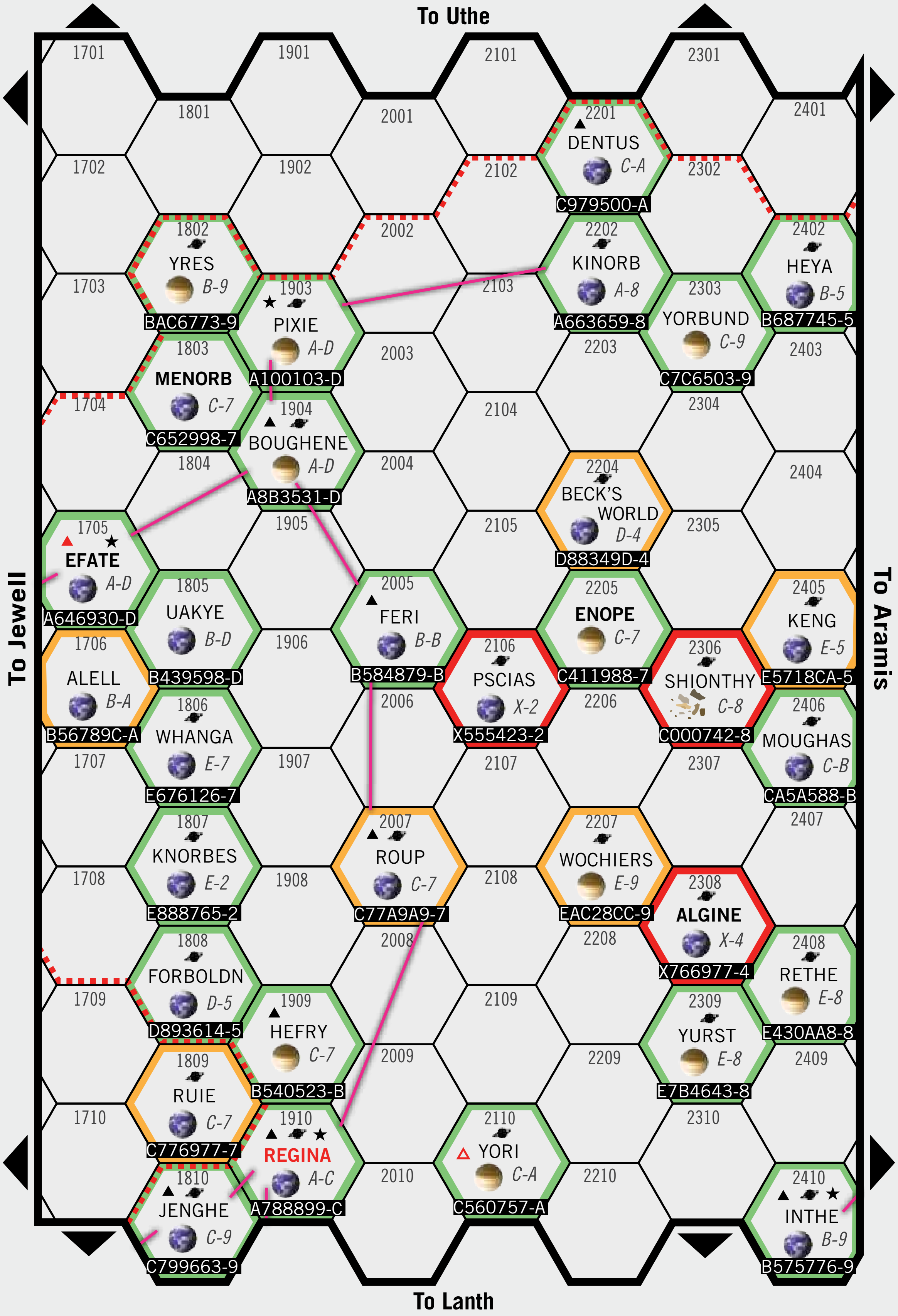
REGINA SUBSECTOR

Much of this campaign takes place in the Regina subsector of the Spinward Marches. The systems of the subsector are summarised here and individual worlds throughout the campaign's adventures. More detailed information can be located in *Behind the Claw*.

REGINA SUBSECTOR SYSTEM TABLE

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Alell	1706		B56789C-A	Ri	A	Imperium	
Algine	2308		X766977-4	Hi Ga	R	Imperium	G
Beck’s World	2204		D88349D-4	Ni	A	Imperium	G
Boughene	1904	S	A8B3531-D	Fl Ni		Imperium	G
Dentus	2201	S	C979500-A	Ni		Imperium	
Efate	1705	N W	A646930-D	Hi In		Imperium	
Enope	2205		C411988-7	Hi Ic In Na		Imperium	
Feri	2005	S	B584879-B	Ri		Imperium	
Forboldn	1808		D893614-5	Ni		Imperium	G
Hefry	1909	S	C200423-7	Ni Va		Imperium	
Heya	2402		B687745-5	Ag Ga Ri		Imperium	G
Inthe	2410	N S	B575776-9	Ag		Imperium	G
Jenghe	1810	S	C799663-9	Ni		Imperium	G
Keng	2405		E5718CA-5		A	Imperium	G
Kinorb	2202		A663659-8	Ni Ri		Imperium	G
Knorbes	1807		E888765-2	Ag Ri		Imperium	G
Menorb	1803		C652998-7	Hi Po		Imperium	
Moughas	2406		CA5A588-B	Ni		Imperium	G
Pixie	1903	N	A100103-D	Lo Va		Imperium	G
Pscias	2106		X555423-2	Ni	R	Imperium	G
Regina	1910	N S	A788899-C	Ri		Imperium	G
Rethe	2408		E430AA8-8	De Hi Na Po		Imperium	G
Roup	2007	S	C77A9A9-7	Hi In Wa	A	Imperium	G
Ruie	1809		C776977-7	Hi In	A		G
Shionthy	2306		C000742-8	As Na Va	R	Imperium	G
Uakye	1805		B439598-D	Ni		Imperium	
Whanga	1806		E676126-7	Lo		Imperium	G
Wochiers	2207		EAC28CC-9	Fl	A	Imperium	G
Yorbund	2303		C7C6503-9	Fl Ni		Imperium	
Yori	2110		C560757-A	De Ri		Imperium	G
Yres	1802		BAC6773-9	Fl		Imperium	G
Yurst	2309		E7B4643-8	Fl Ni		Imperium	G

REGINA SUBSECTOR


To Uthe
To Jewell
To Aramis
To Lanth
1701
1901
2101
2301
1801
2001
2201 DENTUS C-A C979500-A
2401
1702
1902
2102
2302
1802 YRES B-9 BAC6773-9
2002
2202 KINORB A-8 A663659-8
2402 HEYA B-5 B687745-5
1703
1903 PIXIE A-D A100103-D
2103
2303 YORBUND C-9 C7C6503-9
1803 MENORB C-7 C652998-7
2003
2203
2403
1704
1904 BOUGHENE A-D A8B3531-D
2104
2304
1804
2004
2204 BECK'S WORLD D-4 D88349D-4
2404
1705 EFATE A-D A646930-D
1905
2105
2305
1805 UAKYE B-D B439598-D
2005 FERI B-B B584879-B
2205 ENOPE C-7 C411988-7
2405 KENG E-5 E5718CA-5
1706 ALELL B-A B56789C-A
1906
2106 PSCIAS X-2 X555423-2
2306 SHIONTHY C-8 C000742-8
1806 WHANGA E-7 E676126-7
2006
2206
2406 MOUGHAS C-B CA5A588-B
1707
1907
2107
2307
1807 KNORBES E-2 E888765-2
2007 ROUP C-7 C77A9A9-7
2207 WOCHIERS E-9 EAC28CC-9
2407
1708
1908
2108
2308 ALGINE X-4 X766977-4
1808 FORBOLDN D-5 D893614-5
2008
2208
2408 RETHE E-8 E430AA8-8
1709
1909 HEFRY C-7 B540523-B
2109
2309 YURST E-8 E7B4643-8
1809 RUIE C-7 C776977-7
2009
2209
2409
1710
1910 REGINA A-C A788899-C
2110 YORI C-A C560757-A
2310
1810 JENGHE C-9 C799663-9
2010
2210
2410 INTHE B-9 B575776-9

- Gas Giant
- ★ Imperial Naval Base
- ▲ Imperial Scout Base
- ▲ Imperial Scout Way Station
- *B-6* Starport Class & Tech Level
- △ Research Station
- 🟩 Secure System
- 🟧 Amber Zone
- 🟥 Red Zone
- — X-boat Route
- Asteroids (no atmosphere/water)
- ● Planet (dry)
- ● Planet (water present)
- ▪▪▪▪▪ Imperium Border

BODYSNATCHERS

Regina... It thinks it's so much more than it is. The heart of the Spinward Marches, the great spinward bastion of Imperial culture... billions of deluded idiots, who believe that if they dress and talk like a Core-worlder, they'll be the same on the inside too. They don't realise they're a joke, a backwater, a non-entity in the grand scheme. The whole of the Marches could slip between the cracks of the bureaucracy on Capital, if some clerk pressed the wrong key, and no-one would notice for a decade... and even when they found it, no-one would care.

I once jumped in and took a shuttle down to Credo, went to a bar and told people that I'd just come from Dagudashag and had they heard the latest gossip from court? In 20 minutes, I'd convinced them that wearing live chickens on your head was the big thing on Capital these days. Sold 'em my cargo full of frozen poultry for 100 times the normal price... those were special haute couture chickens, you see. Very rare.

The rest of the planet remembers where it is. They remember the Long Night and their culture has the scars and xenophobia you expect in the Marches, unlike the borrowed gaudiness of Credo. They still don't trust offworlders in parts of Regina and if you go down the wrong street in certain cities, you may not come back. The datafiles tag the planet at Law Level 9 – sure... for offworlders, that's about right but not for natives. They have their own ways that they didn't import from the Core.

— Personal Journal of Vlen Backett

The Travellers receive word that Vlen Backett is dead and are requested to come to Regina to collect his body and personal effects. On arrival at the highport, they are interviewed by the authorities and learn that Vlen died under suspicious circumstances. From there, they travel down to Credo, where they obtain several leads about Vlen's death. These bring them to Professor Ujinka, of the University of Regina.

They meet Professor Ujinka, an expert on the Ancients. She describes an experimental technique for detecting Ancient sites, one that Vlen was very interested in funding. While the Travellers are meeting with the professor, they are attacked by assassins. These assassins give the Travellers a vital clue about Vlen's death – the crime lord Ven Yasha was responsible for the murder. Ven Yasha is a mysterious and elusive figure but his second-in-command Harlen was the one who actually murdered Backett and the Travellers set out to track him down.

The Travellers enter the criminal underworld of Regina Highport and find their way to Harlen's secret lair, where they must defeat his criminal goons in order to recover Vlen's stolen possessions.

DEATH NOTICE

There is no method of faster-than-light communication in the Imperium. Messages are carried by couriers or on the x-boat network in mail drums (high-density computer memory cores, containing quadrillions of bits of data) from one system to the next and then transmitted by conventional radio or laser comms. Messages therefore propagate out from the origin at the speed of a courier vessel (usually jump-4 capable). Travellers may pick up their messages at a starport or send their ship identity code to the local communications relay and download any stored messages.

The Inheritor receives a message – give them Handout 2. The datestamp is three days ago, plus one week for every four parsecs distance they currently are from Regina. The message is a high-priority one and electronically stamped with the seal of the Duchy of Regina, implying it is an important official message.

It is properly sealed and is almost certainly genuine. As the Travellers make their way to Regina, they receive several other copies of the message; as a high-priority transmission, it has been copied to every starport and relay, and will be held indefinitely. The journey to Regina is uneventful, unless the Referee wishes to throw in a side encounter en route.

REGINA HIGHPORT

Read the following when the Travellers arrive at Regina:

You jump into the Regina system, emerging from jump space some distance from the main world, as the jump shadow of the gas giant Assiniboia means that ships cannot always arrive close to the moon itself. Your navigation screen lights up with hundreds of contacts. Most are small traders and freighters but *as you come closer to the highport, you detect larger ships. Much larger ships. Up ahead, there's a convoy of megafreighters. You pass by these slow-moving titans; each one of them could swallow your ship 5,000 times over, at least. The names and port registrations are redolent of distant, exotic worlds far off in the Core systems. These ships have been travelling for months, jumping across the Corridor sector.*

Off to one side, there is a flotilla of Imperial warships, part of the sector fleet. They glitter in the darkness, but you cannot get too close; there is a military interdiction zone around them. Even at a distance, however, they are a sight to behold. At the centre of the formation is the 200,000-ton Korrirak*-class dreadnought* Pride of Efate*; your ship could fly down the barrel of that meson gun with plenty of room to spare on all sides. A constellation of smaller warships surround the* Pride *and you can see a swarm of troop transport shuttles making their way from the highport to the flotilla along a military flight lane.*

Regina is one of the most heavily-trafficked systems in the Spinward Marches so as you fly closer to the highport, you are assigned an approach vector to make sure you do not interfere with the courses of any of the other thousands of ships. Usually, a small ship like yours would get put into a holding orbit for hours until a docking berth became available, or you would get sent to one of the smaller stations, but this time you are contacted directly by traffic control.

'This is Regina Control. We have you logged as a Public Order Commission special visitor, please confirm your identity.'

As soon as the Travellers confirm that yes, they are here because they were contacted by the POC, read out the following:

There is a pause of a few seconds and then the traffic controller comes back on the line. 'We are transferring you to a priority approach vector. Confirm reception of navigational data.' This new course will bring you right into the heart of the highport immediately. This is the sort of treatment nobles and admirals get.

The highport swells from a dot to a sphere until it fills your entire screen. The station itself is a rough sphere of metal but it is surrounded by rings of smaller stations, undocked ships, cargo depots, defence satellites, buoys and beacons. You weave between these obstacles until you drop into your assigned approach vector, which brings you to a secure docking berth on the ventral side of the station. The lights on board flicker for an instant as the support umbilical latches onto your hull.

On disembarking, the Travellers are met by highport security guards, who bear the Imperial Starburst proudly on their armour. The Travellers are asked to wait at the docking berth for a representative of the Public Order Commission. If asked, the guards say they have no idea why the Travellers are being given such unusual treatment; they are part of the Imperial security forces and have nothing to do with the POC, whose jurisdiction does not extend to the extra-territorial starport.

A few minutes later, four agents of the POC arrive, led by Pallod Norrim. He signs an electronic chit confirming that he has taken custody of the Travellers from the starport security staff, then requests that they accompany him to the Regina Territorial Zone attached to the station, where they can discuss the matter of Vlen Backett.

PALLOD NORRIM

Norrim is portly but light on his feet, the mark of a man who has spent many years in the slightly lower gravity of a space station. He is dressed in a POC uniform, a green militaristic outfit with crystal-blue epaulets and a blue cap; hanging at his side is a personal computer, which he hardly ever uses. He speaks slowly and deliberately, enunciating every word of his Galanglic to ensure offworlders can follow his accent. He is the chief representative of the POC at the highport, so his job exists in the tangled grey area between Imperial and planetary law.

Pallod Norrim privately thinks of himself as a beekeeper. The offworlders swarm around him, buzzing and flitting back and forth in what seems like chaos, however really they are following very simple rules as they search for what they need and defend against threats to their hives. He must wear protective garments – the strict application of Regina law – to defend against their stings but as long as he takes basic precautions, the bees are essentially harmless. He has dealt with tens of thousands of cases over his long career and no matter how strange the circumstances are (aliens and Travellers seem to delight in bringing in added complications to quite simple cases), he has found that they almost always boil down to one of a handful of problems. Someone lied, someone got drunk, someone quarrelled with someone else. Just let the bees buzz until they have exhausted themselves, then sweep them up and fix the problem.

PALLOD NORRIM

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	43

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	9	Admin 2, Advocate 4, Broker 2, Diplomat 2, Investigate 3, Persuade 2, Streetwise 2
DEX	7	EDU	9	
END	8	SOC	8	

Playing Norrim:

- Speak clearly but never actually say anything. Couch everything in polite phrases and diplomatic vagueness. Never say 'no' when you can say 'not at this time'; never say 'yes' when you can say 'I shall certainly endeavour to do so, circumstances permitting'.
- Never get angry or raise your voice, unless you are exerting your authority.
- Stroke your moustache thoughtfully.
- Look straight at the person you are talking too. Keep your shoulders squared and your back straight.

Then, in Pallod's private classification system, there are the wasps. Wasps look like bees at first glance but they are more aggressive and keep stinging. He suspects Vlen Backett's case might be a wasp; more complex and more damaging than a simple murder enquiry. Therefore, he intends to swat the case as soon as possible.

THE PUBLIC ORDER OFFICE

Inspector Norrim escorts you through a maze of corridors to a small shuttle. The shuttle detaches from the highport and crosses to another, smaller space station only a few kilometres away. Your shuttle nestles into a bay alongside several interceptors in police livery and docks once more. A short elevator ride takes you into the heart of the Public Order Commission offices.

Norrim shows you into his office – blandly functional, with a large holoportrait of Duke Norris on the wall – and sits down behind his desk. The hardwood desk is an imposing antique and must have cost a small fortune to ship into orbit. The inspector activates a privacy seal as he addresses you.

'It is the belief of the Public Order Commission that Vlen Backett was murdered. The circumstances of his death certainly suggest foul play; Backett was found in the Traveller's Aid Hostel in Startown. He had been shot with a low-calibre projectile weapon – presumably a silenced one, as no-one heard anything. He was taken to the Tan Shalve Medical Centre, where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

No weapon was found at the hostel and the room was sprayed with an aerosol chemical solvent that destroys most forms of forensic evidence. The case is under investigation, of course, but such things take time.'

Norrim pauses and taps at his personal computer for a few seconds, bringing up a document on screen. 'According to the physician, tests on the blood of Vlen Backett showed a high level of Tusal, an illegal narcotic. Traces of the drug were also found on Backett's clothing and in his luggage. His belongings were scattered across the hostel room, implying a hasty search.'

The inspector looks straight at you. 'If you have any information pertinent to this case, now would be the time to volunteer it.'

Norrim obviously suspects that Vlen Backett was a drug smuggler and that he was killed when some deal went wrong. The Travellers obviously have no idea about Vlen's recent movements. Once the inspector is convinced that they have nothing useful to tell him, he sighs and tells them they can collect Backett's corpse and belongings from the Credo Public Order Office, planetside. There is a travel bond in Backett's name for the sum of Cr100000; more than enough to take the body home.

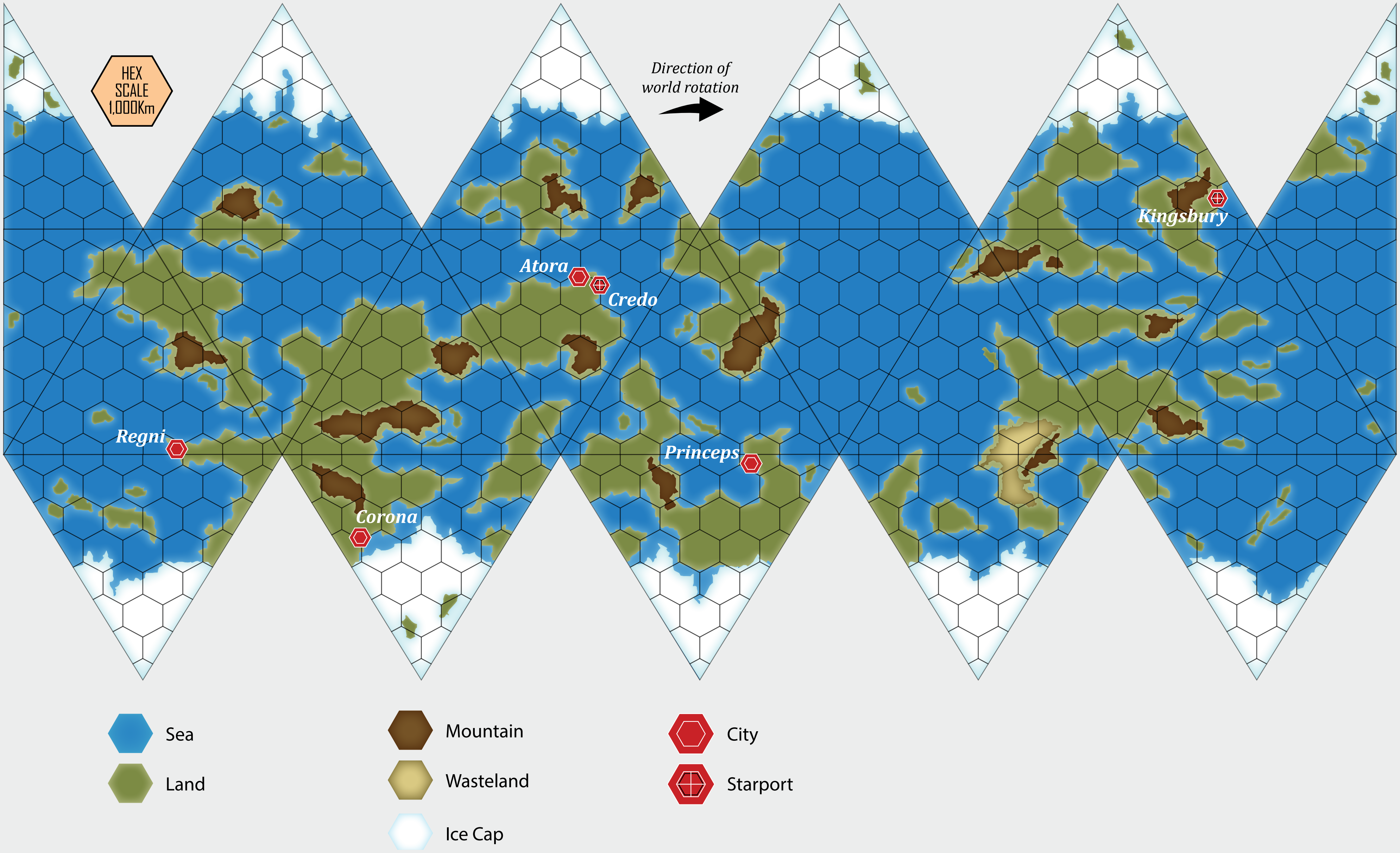
The Travellers may have questions for the inspector about the case – see page 15 for more details on Backett's movements. Norrim answers questions reluctantly and in the vaguest possible terms, stonewalling the Travellers if possible; it is an ongoing case, he cannot comment or speculate and so on. Frustrate the Travellers and make them want to follow up the investigation on their own by making it clear that Norrum will be of no help to them (Norrim is not unsympathetic but believes the matter of Vlen Backett should be handled by the Public Order Commission alone).

HEADING PLANETSIDE

Shuttles depart from the highport to the planet every hour, landing at Regina Downport, in the middle of Startown. From there, the Travellers can catch a monorail into Credo, head to the Traveller's Aid Hostel or pursue other investigations.

REGINA

UWP: A788899-C


HEX SCALE 1,000Km
Direction of world rotation
Atora
Credo
Kingsbury
Regni
Princeps
Corona
Sea
Land
Mountain
Wasteland
Ice Cap
City
Starport

INVESTIGATIONS IN CREDO

You crowd onto a shuttle to the surface. About half the passengers are Regina citizens; the rest are fellow Travellers and spacers. There is a hubbub of strange accents and languages, and you catch fragments of gossip about galactic affairs. One newly-arrived Traveller from the Core worlds peers around himself and wonders out loud if any of you are Zhodani spies; another claims to be a cousin of the Emperor and would anyone like the honour of buying him dinner for he has temporarily mislaid his wallet and his starship. A few seconds later, a pair of Public Order Commission Officers appear, grab the panhandling prince and melt away into the crowd once more.

The shuttle detaches from Regina Highport and falls towards the surface. You pass over the spine of another megafreighter; off to one side you see a brightly coloured Aslan spice merchant heading for the jump line. A trio of fast interceptors fly alongside your shuttle for a few moments before peeling off, their grav plates flaring brightly in the shadow of the freighter.

And then you are out in open space and you can see the planet below.

Or, more accurately, the moon. Regina is the moon of the gas giant Assiniboia and the ruddy-yellow crescent of the gas giant dominates the viewport. Below you is Regina itself; you are spinning down towards its nightside and you can see the lights of cities spread out like a constellation. There you can see the edge of the coast, marked by a brighter line of lights and then a great darkness. There are the lights of Credo City, a bright halo surrounding an even brighter core and there is Atora – the two cities are growing together into one continent-spanning metropolis.

Between the two is Regina Downport and Startown. Your shuttle cuts through the atmosphere and flies over Startown; you glimpse narrow streets crowded with neon between the huge bulk of warehouses and fuel depots.

After landing, you step out onto those neon streets and look up. It is just after local dawn. Assiniboia hangs above you like an accusing eye. A Public Order Commission Officer at the starport gates gestures towards you. 'Move along, citizens! No loitering. No loitering in Startown.'

The key clue that the Travellers need to pick up in this section is the message from Professor Ujinka; everything else is just background information. You can draw this section out or compress it as much as you like.

There are three events that take place during this investigation – meeting Detective Odoy, possibly realising that the Travellers are under observation and the 'official' end to the investigation. Odoy can meet the Travellers at the hostel or the morgue; run *We're Being Watched*... on page 18 whenever the action lulls. Finally, Chief Inspector Norrim contacts the Travellers just before they head off to meet with Professor Ujinka.

THE MORGUE

Inspector Norrim told the Travellers that Backett's corpse and belongings are stored in the Credo Public Order Office; it is a colossal building, made out of black synthstone; Travellers may recognise it as a perfect copy of the Imperial Ministry of Justice headquarters on Capital. There are always huge crowds outside the POC Office, thanks to the Reginan custom of Assumption of Custody. The Travellers have to queue behind angry citizens, offworlders demanding compensation for wrongful arrest or people trying to cope with the choking bureaucracy of Regina. An Average (8+) Admin check lets the Travellers get through the paperwork in a reasonable time; otherwise, they are shuttled from department-to-department for hours.

Eventually, they are escorted to the morgue, where Backett's body is stored. The Travellers must give the name of a ship for the body to be transferred too but they can lie if they want to see the corpse for themselves. They may also request a copy of the forensic report.

The Body: Only a cursory examination of the body was carried out, as the cause of death is very clear. Vlen Backett was shot in the heart. A successful Medic or Gun Combat check notes that the wound is surprisingly clean and only minimal damage was done – there is no exit wound at the back and the damage is extremely localised.

In fact, Backett arranged for his own death; minimising the damage ensures that his resurrection will go smoothly. He has cybernetic implants (TL20+) that protect his brain even in the event of death. These implants are undetectable except by dissecting his brain and Backett has defence mechanisms to protect him in such an eventuality.

The body is stored inside a cryo tube.

The Forensic Report: The forensic report confirms what Pallod Norrim told the Travellers; Vlen Backett was killed by a gunshot from close range, probably a low-velocity snub pistol.

Blood tests show a high level of Tusal in Backett's bloodstream; at that level, he would barely have been able to stand, let alone fight back.

Backett's Belongings: Backett's possessions at the time of death amount to the following:

- Sundry clothing and toiletries
- Cr13400
- A TAS membership card
- Used tickets for middle passage on board the *Great Eastern* liner from Rhylanor to Regina
- A personal comm

THE TRAVELLERS' AID SOCIETY HOSTEL

There are so many visitors to Regina that the Traveller's Aid Society operates several hostels. The largest and most prestigious is on the highport station but there are four more hostels located in other cities on the surface. 'Hostel' conjures up images of dormitories and budget accommodation but TAS Hostels range from cramped, mildewed hellholes to luxurious clubs. Most of the Regina hostels are exceedingly well-equipped and comfortable, on par with high quality hotels.

The one exception is the Regina Down TAS Hostel. Technically within Credo city limits, this hostel is really part of Startown. It is hundreds of years old and looks it – the building's exterior is shabby, the concierge computer outdated and forgetful, and the beds have exotic parasites from all over the sector.

To get into the hostel, the Travellers need to either have a TAS member in their party or use Vlen Backett's card. They may also try to persuade staff that they should be allowed in, using Persuade, Deception or Carouse checks.

The Murder: The TAS staff have already been interviewed by the Public Order Commission, and have little further to add. If the Travellers insist, they go over their testimony again.

- Backett was an infrequent visitor to the hostel; he would show up every few years, stay for anything from a few days to several months and then vanish again.
- He arrived three days before his death.
- On the night of the shooting, Backett returned to the hostel with three other men. TAS members are allowed to receive visitors at the hostel, so long as they vouch for their guests. All three provided identity cards; the POC have since confirmed that all three cards were forgeries.
- Backett seemed nervous but not intoxicated or especially worried.
- Poor-quality security camera footage of the three is available. Two of the figures are clearly visible; they are big, dangerous-looking thugs. The third visitor was standing behind the other two and no details can be made out, other than his reddish hair.
- They ordered drinks to be brought to the room.
- Two of the visitors remained in the corridor outside, as if on guard. After an hour, one of them left the hostel and returned 45 minutes later.
- Two hours later, the three visitors left in a hurry. Before they left, one of the visitors called the front desk and reported a spillage in Backett's room. When the cleaning robot arrived, it discovered Backett's corpse and raised the alarm.
- Around the same time, there was an unexplained power surge that knocked out computer and surveillance systems in the area. The origin of this surge has yet to be discovered.

There are several inconsistencies in this story that neither the police nor the TAS staff can explain. The three visitors are criminals working for Ven Yasha, who is an alternate identity of Vlen Backett. Backett suspected he was under observation by Imperial Intelligence and that they were worryingly close to discovering his secrets. Backett decided that the best approach was to have himself 'killed'; his Ancient master could resurrect him later. The whole murder was staged for the benefit of Imperial Intelligence.

One of the thugs left after an hour; he went out to purchase several doses of the illegal drug tusal; partially to dull the pain of being shot for Backett but also to throw the police off the trail. Asking around outside with a Difficult (10+) Streetwise check lets the Travellers pick up a rumour that a drug dealer called Darrian Jak sold a lot of tusal on the night Vlen Backett died.

The anomalous detail of the killer calling for the cleaner before leaving was to minimise the amount of time Backett spent outside cryo; the mysterious power cut was caused by an Ancients device in the possession of the killers. See Assassins! on page 23 for more details.

The Message: While the Travellers are in the TAS hostel, a message arrives at the front desk, addressed to Backett. As Vlen's next of kin, the Travellers can take this message – give them Handout 3.

DETECTIVE ODOY

Detective Odoy is another Public Order Commission Officer, although he is currently on 'medical leave' pending psychological assessment. For years, Odoy has been on the trail of a semi-mythical criminal named Ven Yasha. He is convinced that Ven Yasha is behind hundreds of unexplained crimes and murders on Regina and may be the secret leader of the Ine Givar in the Marches.

Odoy is unstable and jittery; his skin is pock-marked, a side effect of the mood stabiliser drugs he takes to stay functional. He is extremely paranoid and nervous, and takes absurd precautions against being overheard. His condition has deteriorated in the last year, his delusions growing worse. He is an embarrassment to the Public Order Commission and has been placed on leave while the legal machinery is put in place to force his retirement.

Odoy suspected Vlen Backett of being part of Ven Yasha's organisation; now that Backett is dead under mysterious circumstances, Odoy believes that Backett must have been murdered under Yasha's orders. Chief Inspector Norrim kept Odoy well away from the Backett case, so Odoy is forced to stalk the Travellers until he gets a chance to talk to them.

At an appropriate juncture – say, when one of the Travellers splits off from the rest of the party to attend to some business – they encounter Odoy. Read the following:

'Don't look over.'

There is a man leaning against the wall nearby. He has got a hat drawn down over his eyes and he is facing away from you, talking into his hand-held comm – but you can see that the comm unit is turned off.

'I know who killed Vlen Backett. I can help you find him. There is a bar down in Startown, the Flotsam. Meet me there at 10pm. Make sure you are not followed.'

The Flotsam: If the Travellers wish to keep this appointment, they can find the Flotsam easily enough. It is a run-down spacer's bar in the shadow of the downport; it smells of spilled beer and that curious metallic tang that clings to people who have spent months in recycled atmospheres. There is no sign of Odoy initially – the ex-cop is lurking atop a warehouse across the street from the bar. He is paranoid enough to watch the entrance to make sure the Travellers are not followed. Once Odoy is convinced that none of Ven Yasha's agents followed the Travellers, he enters the bar and joins them.

The strange man shuffles over to your table, shooting glances over his shoulder. His eyes dart around the room, as if marking the exits. He grabs a chair and moves it over to one side, so he can sit with his back to the wall.

'The name's Odoy. Detective First Class. I'm armed, by the way, don't make any sudden moves.' He grins suddenly, as if his face just spasmed.

'Have you ever heard of a man called Ven Yasha? He's got his finger in every cargo that comes through Regina. I've been trying to find a way into his organisation for years, looking for him to slip up. He's bribed half the Commission and he's got spies everywhere.

I think he killed Vlen Backett, or ordered his death anyway. I don't know what Backett was up to – maybe he was one of Yasha's couriers, or something, but he was involved. I'm not on the case – and isn't that interesting, no ulterior motives there I'm sure – and you can't rely on the rest of the POC. They couldn't find Assiniboia at midnight.'

If the Travellers have not already visited the TAS Hostel, then Odoy suggests trying there; if they have the clue sending them to Professor Ujinka, he encourages them to follow up on that. Odoy has connections and can help the Travellers if they go after Ven Yasha. He does not know where Ven Yasha's current base of operation is.

Likely questions from the Travellers might be:

Why would Ven Yasha have Backett killed? *'Yasha's obsessed with protecting his organisation. Anyone he doesn't trust, he kills. That's my guess. That, or Backett had something that Yasha wanted.'*

Is Yasha involved in tusal dealing?: *'Drugs? You think Ven Yasha is dealing drugs? You have no idea of the scale this guy operates on, none whatsoever. The only drug he deals in is power. Yasha's interested in politics and technology, not getting high.'*

Why are you off the case? *'Damn bureaucrats! They've got me on medical leave. Psychologically unstable. Paranoid. Mood swings. Delusions of persecution and conspiracy. Violent tendencies. Lying bastards.'*

DETECTIVE ODOY

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	39

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	7	Advocate 2, Carouse 2, Deception 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Investigate 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1
DEX	7	EDU	8	
END	7	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Body Pistol (3D-3)

Playing Odoy:

- Be nervous. Look over your shoulder a lot, glare suspiciously at anyone who asks you a personal question.
- Mumble under your breath.
- Lean in close, in a conspiratorial way.

WE'RE BEING WATCHED...

The Travellers are under observation by agents of Imperial Intelligence. These spies are working for Gand Holcess (see page 5). There are two agents trailing the Travellers around Regina; they picked them up at the highport and have been on their tail ever since. The agents are Hargid Voss and Stej Lanner; their orders are to watch the Travellers and not to interfere unless absolutely necessary.

Call for occasional Recon checks; if a Traveller gets an Effect of 5+, they get the feeling they are being watched. Two successes in a row lets the Traveller spot the tail; the Travellers can set up task chains to boost their chances of finding the tail (say, a Streetwise check to intuit the layout of the city and find good places to turn the tables on the agents, Stealth or Deception checks to trick them and so on). If spotted, the agents fall back; if there is a risk of being captured, they alert the Public Order troops and have the area closed down.

Use the two agents to make the Travellers increasingly paranoid as this goes on and to foreshadow the involvement of Gand Holcess in the next few missions. Other nasty tricks the agents can try:

- Breaking into the Travellers' accommodation and planting listening devices.
- Accessing the Travellers' computer files and tapping their communications. The agents have allies in the Public Order Commission, so they can exert considerable political influence and bend the rules.
- Follow the Travellers around and question people they meet.

THE CRIME IS SOLVED

At an appropriately surprising juncture, the Travellers are contacted by Chief Inspector Norrim. He has important news – a standard Assumption of Custody sweep has identified Backett's killer. The inspector explains that they used the security footage from the TAS Hostel to create a profile of the likely murderer – short, red-haired, involved in the tusal trade, and potentially violent. The Public Order Commission pulled in a score of suspects and questioned them all, and one of them is going to be charged with the crime.

The accused killer is a small-time tusal smuggler and thug called Darrian Jak; he is not actually a Darrian but has elfin features reminiscent of that race. He denies murdering anyone in the TAS Hostel but the POC can tie him to half-a-dozen other violent incidents and he has no alibi for that night.

Secretly, Chief Inspector Norrim knows that Jak is innocent of that crime; pinning the Backett murder on the thug ends his involvement with Imperial Intelligence. Metaphorically, it is shooing that troublesome wasp out the window.

The Travellers can react to this news as they wish. It is obvious that Darrian Jak is not the actual killer and that the police are dropping the case for some mysterious reason; do they press on secretly or complain to the authorities?

PROFESSOR UJINKA, I PRESUME

Professor Iaros Ujinka is an elderly member of the archaeology and history faculty at the University of Regina. Travellers who have Science (history) 1+ or connections in that field may have heard of Iaros; she is an expert on the Ancients civilisation and was highly respected in the field until an incident 12 years ago. There is an Ancients site on the planet Inthe, six parsecs trailing of Regina. This site is officially a state secret, although its existence is common knowledge among researchers and tourists. Ujinka and several of her colleagues fought a high-profile legal battle with the Scout Service to have the Inthe site opened up to civilian researchers; the case dragged on for years until it was eventually resolved by the Archduke of Deneb himself, who sided with the Scout Service. Relations between the University and the government were severely scarred by the whole affair and Ujinka's reputation suffered greatly. There were even allegations that she helped thieves break into the Inthe site to steal buried artefacts.

According to the Regina news networks, she has been offworld on a research mission for three years; the University of Regina has several offworld dig sites related to the Ancients. Now, she has returned.

THE ESTATE AT DANCADO

Professor Ujinka has a large home in the countryside outside Credo City, in the region called Dancado. Technically, Dancado is the private property of the Duke of Regina but a few respected families are permitted to lease land in the estate and live there. The house has been in Ujinka's family for generations.

As the Dancado region is part of the duke' s private domain, grav cars and other flyers are restricted to a limited number of flight paths. The standard mode of travel is by charmingly old-fashioned ground car or even by riding. The Travellers can hire a ground car in Credo City; once they are out of the press of the multi-level city, the drive is a pleasant one, winding its way through the forests of Dancado. The trees here have adapted to their environment; each has two sets of leaves. One set is for absorbing sunlight from Regina's primary star, the other set of grey fronds is for feeding on reflected light from Assiniboia. This is unsettling for non-natives, as the trees squirm sometimes to pick up more of the wan light from the gas giant.

Call for a Difficult (10+) Recon check as the Travellers drive to Ujinka's house. If a Traveller succeeds, they catch the occasional glimpse of a POC grav car that seems to be keeping pace with them. This grav car belongs to Hargid Voss and Stej Lanner, the two Imperial Intelligence agents who are following the Travellers.

Ujinka's home is surrounded by a high fence enclosing several square kilometres of garden. When the Travellers drive up to the gate, they are scanned by an automated security system that confirms their identity. A successful Recon check notes the presence of armed drones lurking in the trees; such weapon systems are illegal on Regina without extensive special permits and are certainly an impressive amount of firepower for a private residence.

CONTACTING INSPECTOR NORRIM

The Travellers may wish to contact Inspector Norrim, either to find out if there is any progress on the case or to ask him about Detective Odoy. He steadfastly refuses to comment on the investigation into Backett's death (if the Travellers volunteer information about Professor Ujinka or some other clue, then Norrim 'takes it under advisement' and passes the lead onto Imperial Intelligence). As for Detective Odoy, he tells the Travellers that Odoy is medically unfit for duty and should not be trusted.

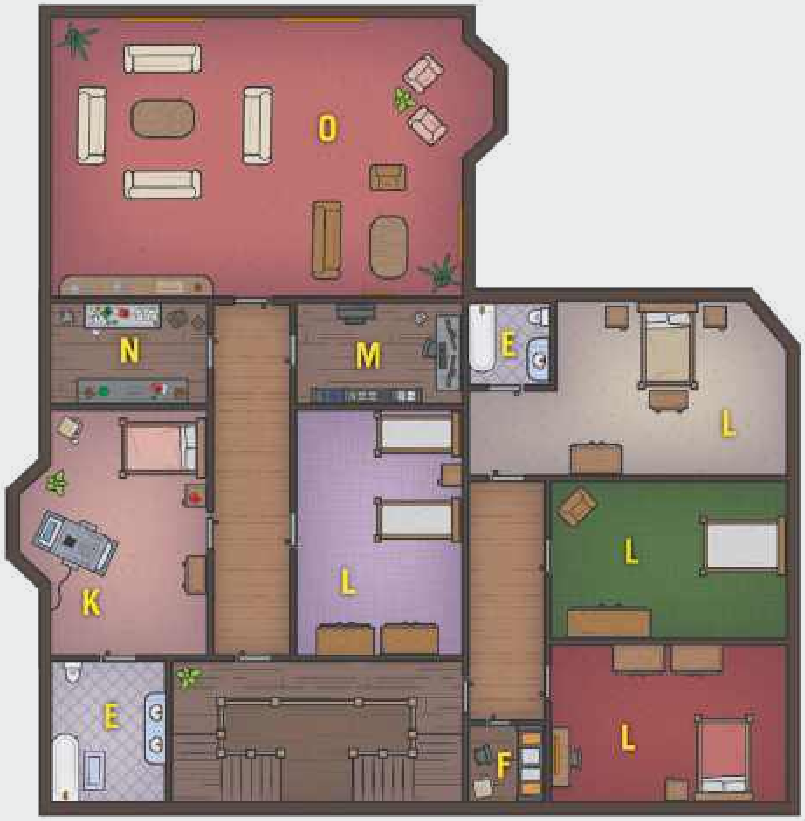
The short avenue up to the house winds through the trees. There are several strange pieces of sculpture in the grounds; a Traveller with Science (history) 2+ or Art (visual media) 1+ recognises them as copies of Ancients structures. The house itself is an impressive structure on the edge of an artificial lake.

LAYOUT OF THE HOUSE

The house is packed with Ujinka's collections of curios, old furniture and antiques. Ujinka is the only human resident; there are six family robots who have been part of the household for more than three centuries and who were the only entities living there for the last four years.

- **Entrance Hallway:** There is a control panel by the front door to control the locks and gate access.
- **Dining Room:** This room has not been used in more than a decade; Ujinka eats at her desk when she remembers to eat at all.
- **Kitchen:** The kitchen systems are all more than 100 years old and rarely used; there is a budget automated food preparation machine on one countertop where Ujinka makes her meals. She still eats like a grad student.
- **Utility Room:** This room contains the house's computer core, including controls for the security drones. The house's fission cell is under the floor.
- **Bathrooms**
- **Storerooms:** Filled with junk and old furniture.
- **Holoroom:** Old homes on Regina sometimes have holorooms, a chamber lined with holographic projectors used for communications or entertainment. Very old-fashioned.

THE ESTATE AT DANCADO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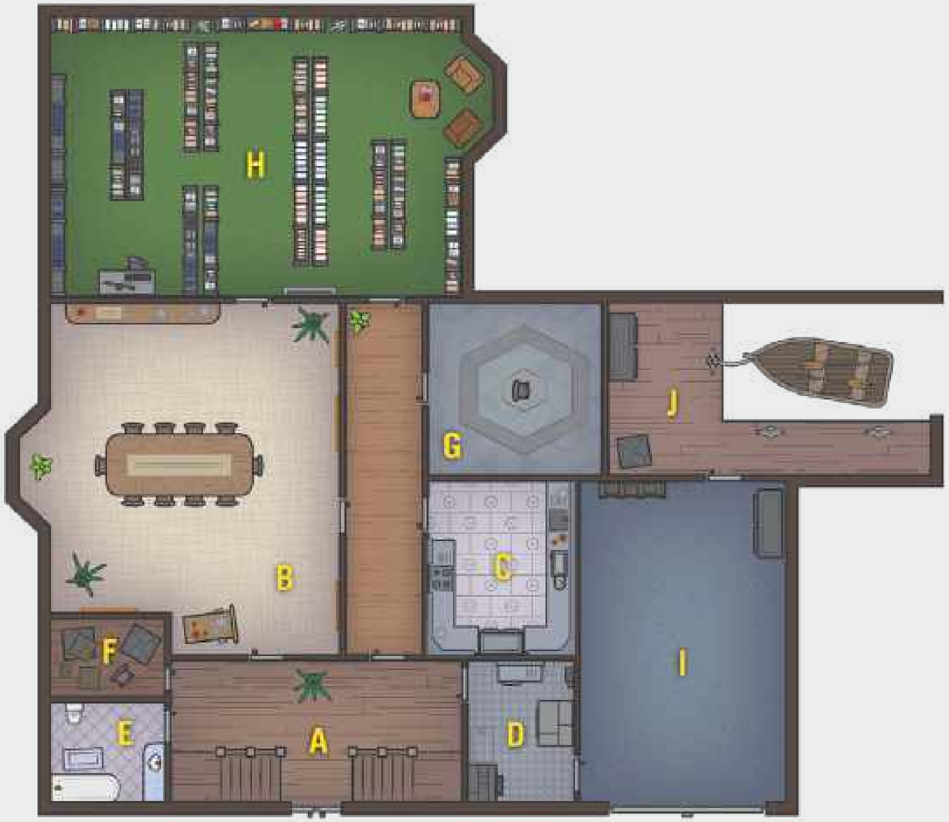
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A. Entrance Hallway
B. Dining Room
C. Kitchen
D. Utility Room
E. Bathrooms

F. Storerooms
G. Holoroom
H. Library
I. Carport
J. Boathouse

K. Autodoc
L. Bedrooms
M. Study
N. Workroom
O. Lounge

1m

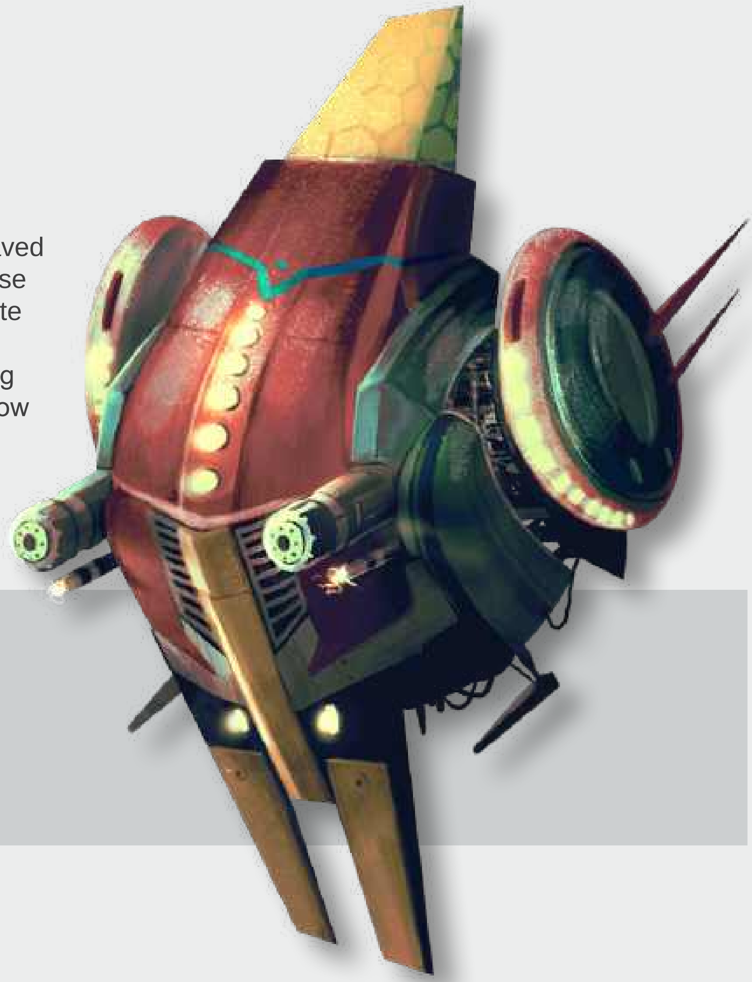
- **Library:** An eclectic mix of data storage media, from data crystals and holowafers to chemical dyes on wood pulp.
- **Carport:** Contains the professor's automated groundcar.
- **Boathouse:** Contains a rowboat and a pair of water-walking pads (highly buoyant gyro-stabilised footwear). The professor likes to take walks out on the lake when pondering some archaeological problem.
- **Autodoc:** The professor lives alone and is quite elderly; her physician insisted she purchase a home autodoc system.
- **Bedrooms**
- **Study:** The professor's study.
- **Workroom:** Used for examining artefacts.
- **Lounge:** Where she receives the Travellers.

CALLING AHEAD

The Travellers might contact Ujinka via comm instead of visiting her house; if they try this, she is shocked by the news of Backett's death but still insists that the Travellers come visit her, so she can discuss Backett's business with them privately.

THE SECURITY DRONES

The professor has a suite of four security drones slaved to the house computer. She obtained a special license to possess such a potent security system for a private dwelling. The drones are all equipped with stunners and laser carbines. While the Travellers are speaking with Ujinka, one of the drones cruises past the window of the lounge and hovers there for a moment before continuing its patrol.



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Security Drone	20	Grav	12m	12	Cr85000
Skills	Gun Combat (energy) 2, Recon 1				
Attacks	Laser Carbine (4D+3, Zero-G), Stunner (3D, Stun, Zero-G)				
Manipulators	2 X (STR 9 DEX 7)				
Endurance	29 hours				
Traits	Armour (+8), Flyer (idle), Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision				
Programming	Hunter/Killer (standard) (INT 4)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Drone Interface, Fire Control System (improved), PRIS Sensor, Recon Sensor (improved), Transceiver 5km (improved), Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (medium), Weapon Mount (small), Wireless Data Link, Spare Slots x9				

TEA AND HISTORY

When the Travellers arrive at the house, read the following:

A robot servant opens the door. 'Professor Ujinka will be with you momentarily. Please follow me to the lounge. Please mind your step.' It is not possible for a robot butler to sniff snootily but this one makes a good attempt. The hallway beyond is packed with shipping crates and boxes; it is like a small freighter dumped its cargo on the mansion. You are led into a large room, one where the whole east wall is transparent, overlooking a lake. On the wall are holos of planets the professor has visited. She has been all over the Marches.

'Hello, I'm a heterogenous catastrophist. Er. Sorry. I've spent far too much time lately arguing with archaeologists. I'm Iaros. Excuse the mess, I'm just back from offworld.' Professor Ujinka enters. She is at least 100 standard years old but moves with the energetic hyperactivity of someone who has just undergone a course of anagathics. She seizes the hand of [whichever Traveller is the Inheritor] *and squeezes it with her callused hands. 'My sincere condolences. Vlen was a remarkable fellow, truly remarkable. Please, sit down. Can I have the machine get you something?'*

Professor Ujinka's robot servants provide food and drink for the Travellers. After some small talk, the professor explains how she knew Vlen Backett.

'Finding Ancients sites has traditionally been a rather hit-or-miss affair. Either the site is so large that it is obvious from orbit, or so well hidden that they are discovered only by chance. All of the surviving intact sites are virtually impossible to detect using conventional sensors – there are no electromagnetic emissions, no thermal signatures, no gravimetric traces. They're effectively invisible.

'Some years ago, I obtained a spacer's diary, where he described an anomalous disturbance in the G-band of his ship's communications system when they were in orbit of Yori – and there's an Ancients site on Yori. I looked into the matter and there are a handful of other cases where other vessels reported similar G-band problems that all correlated with known Ancients sites. I believe that under certain conditions, a G-band signal can be distorted by some aspect of Ancients technology.

'Now, it's not as simple as just tuning your ship's radio to the G-band. It's only under certain conditions and I'm not sure what those are. I applied for funding but the university said my proposal lacked evidence. So, I went ahead anyway, of course.

'There's another dig on Beck's World. My assistant Juni is there now and she's working to isolate the G-band conditions. I contend that with funding and time, we will be able to develop a workable method for finding as-yet-undiscovered Ancients sites.

'I mentioned this to Vlen... four years ago, I think. He said that he might be able to provide a ship and funding for the initial phase of experiments – in exchange for a share of the bounty on any sites found. Now, I'm not sure if you are in a position to keep to this arrangement but if you have access to a ship, then we can see about continuing the project.' Ujinka claps her hands together enthusiastically.

Playing Professor Ujinka:

- Be enthusiastic! Jump from topic-to-topic, be interested in everything.
- Talk with your hands. Gesture wildly.
- Occasionally, stop to catch your breath. Remember you are 100 years old, despite the life-prolonging drugs.

Likely Questions:

- **Do you know who might have murdered Vlen?** *Murdered? Vlen was murdered? Oh my stars! I had no idea! No... I mean, I know that Vlen moved in dangerous circles sometimes but... murdered? Why?*
- **Do you know Ven Yasha?** *Only by reputation. He's a collector of Ancients artefacts. An unscrupulous one, too. I know he tried to bribe one of the university dig teams back in '77, when we first opened up Beck's World. I understand he lives here on Regina but I wouldn't deal with him. I'd love to find out exactly what's in his collection, though.*
- **How does your G-band detection system work?** *Not very well, yet. Juni's the real expert on it. Once she can consistently detect the site on Beck's World, we'll adapt the system for use on a scout ship or something and poke around a bit! I think Vlen had some idea about where to look first... oh, poor man. I suppose that died with him, unless he left a note or something?*
- **Where have you been for the last few years?** *Hither and yon, hither and yon. Mostly Beck's World – there's an Ancients site in the caves there. I also went to a conference in Deneb; that's quite a trip. I gave a talk on heterogenous theory.*

While the Travellers are talking to the Professor, run the next encounter.

ASSASSINS!

Vlen Backett knew Imperial Intelligence was on his trail and decided to clear up all loose ends as part of his temporary death. Killing off the Vlen identity would put an end to the investigation of the Ancients Sons.

Professor Ujinka's research was a topic of great interest to Vlen. If the professor had hit upon a method of locating hidden Ancients sites, it could be useful to Vlen's master. His offer of funding the professor's research was genuine. However, the professor was also a threat to the secrecy of the Ancients Son and her technique could be perfected much more quickly by Vlen's master anyway. Therefore, Vlen decided to have the professor eliminated as soon as she returned to Regina. Two assassins in Ven Yasha's employ are en route to murder Professor Ujinka.

What Vlen could never have predicted was that the Travellers would pick up the professor's message from the hostel and be present when the assassins attacked.

VEN YASHA'S MEN

The two assassins are named Gaius Labre and Mort Kinson. These are the two thugs who guarded Vlen Backett's room in the TAS Hostel; they are both burly, intimidating bruisers with augmented physiques. They are armed with gauss pistols and snubbers but their most dangerous weapon is an Ancients device loaned to them by Ven Yasha. This device suppresses electronic devices within a short range. They used it to escape the TAS Hostel after 'murdering' Vlen Backett and are about to use it to bypass the professor's security systems.

Their plan is to shut down the house, break in and murder the professor. They will then steal any Ancients artefacts to make the motive for the crime appear to be burglary.

Once an electronic device is suppressed by the Ancients device, it can be reactivated with a successful Difficult (10+) skill check (1D minutes, INT), using the most appropriate skill for the device in question or Mechanic. The assassins are aware of this solution and can reactivate their weapons almost instantly.

From the moment the power to the house is cut, the Travellers have only a short time to prepare. Ten rounds (60 seconds) after the power is cut, the two thugs arrive at the house. They see Professor Ujinka at the window and shoot her with a gauss pistol burst. Five rounds after that, Labre bursts through the front door while Kinson circles around to the back and enters through the boathouse.

Read the following to the Travellers:

The professor stands up and wanders over to the window. 'The conference on Deneb really showed how little we understand about the Ancients. Do you know they found a site near the Solomani sphere that had -'

The lightglobes in the walls dim. The holoscreen on the wall goes dark. Outside, something falls into the lake with a splash.

'Emperor's beard! Haven't the household robots been maintaining this place at all?' grumbles the professor. 'U4! Come in here!'

The robot in the hallway outside does not respond. The professor fumbles for her pocket comm. 'It's dead too. All power's gone. Everything's just shut down.'

She glances out the window. 'Hey, there's some-'.

Suddenly, there's a hole in the window... and another hole in Professor Ujinka's chest. A bloody rose blossoms on her robes and she topples to the floor.

Downstairs, you hear the front door smash open. What do you do?

FIGHTING THE ASSASSINS

The Travellers may be unarmed; even if they have weapons with them, any weapon above TL6 is sufficiently complex to be disabled by the Ancients device. Ujinka has no firearms in the house other than the disabled security drones, although she does have a pair of antique broadswords from the Sword Worlds. The Travellers can use melee attacks or try trapping the thugs.

As soon as the thugs kill the professor, or if they encounter significant resistance from the Travellers, they flee – their mission was to kill one old woman, not murder half-a-dozen Travellers.

The assassins also have a ground car parked in the forest some distance away.

Combat Elements:

- Do not let the Travellers know this is an attack until the thugs show up. The power cut should be presented as a weird event, not a precursor to an attack.
- The Travellers are unarmed and facing hardened killers with vastly superior weapons. A frontal attack is suicide. The one advantage they have is numbers.

GALUS LABRE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	35

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	5	Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1
DEX	6	EDU	6	
END	9	SOC	3	

EQUIPMENT	Burglary Kit, Commdot, Mobile Comm **Weapons:** Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2), Knife (1D), Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+5)

MORT KINSON

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	36

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	6	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1
DEX	8	EDU	7	
END	7	SOC	3	

EQUIPMENT	Burglary Kit, Commdot, Mobile Comm **Weapons:** Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2), Knife (1D), Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+5)

Playing Kinson:

- Growl and hunch your shoulders. Move like the world is made of delicate glass and that you like breaking things.
- You are terrified – not only have you been caught red-handed at a murder but you have also failed Ven Yasha. You are a dead man either way. You can try to hide your fear through bravado and aggression, or bargain for a way out.
- Give the impression of barely-contained violence at all times. Even when trapped, Kinson is always only an instant away from trying to strangle his interrogator.

- Use the map of the mansion – the Travellers should be sneaking around rooms, moving from one floor to another via the windows, diving into the lake and so on.
- While a good Mechanic check can be used to reactivate a handgun, the best tactic is to make it down to the utility room and reboot the house's computer, then reactivate the drones. The four security drones are heavily armed and can easily blast the thugs.
- The Travellers will recognise the thugs as the two from the TAS Hostel.

CHASING THE ASSASSINS

As soon as the assassins retreat, they split up and flee through the forest towards their groundcar. Travellers in pursuit must make DEX checks against the assassins. Keep track of the cumulative Effect of both sides; the first side to beat the other's total by 5+ wins.

If the Travellers win, they get to catch one or both of the assassins before they reach the groundcar. If an assassin wins, then he makes it to the car before the Travellers reach him – not that it does him much good. The Imperial Intelligence agents who were trailing the Travellers are waiting there. Any pursuing Travellers arrive just in time to see a POC grav car taking off at high speed.

If *both* assassins made it to the car, then Labre is captured by the intelligence agents while Kinson is left for the Travellers. The criminal is so shocked by the POC's presence that he can be captured easily.

INTERROGATING THE ASSASSIN

Kinson's reaction to the Travellers depends on how the fight in the house proceeded. If the Travellers were easily overwhelmed, then Kinson assumes they will just turn him over to the Regina police and says nothing. If, however, the Travellers fought back successfully, then Kinson assumes they are hardened mercenaries used to dealing with problems themselves and tries to cut a deal with them.

If Detective Odoy is with the Travellers, then he offers to interrogate Kinson.

Kinson reveals the following information under interrogation:

- He has worked for Ven Yasha irregularly for 15 years as a guard or legbreaker. In all that time, he has never met Ven Yasha directly – he was always hired by Ven Yasha's aide, Harlen.

- Harlen contacted Kinson and Labre several weeks ago and ordered them to keep an eye on some Traveller called Backett. They were to watch over him and make sure he was not being followed.
- On the night Backett was murdered, he and Labre accompanied Harlen to the TAS Hostel, where they met Backett. Backett and Harlen seemed to know each other quite well. Labre and Kinson stood guard outside while Harlen talked with Backett.
- At one point, Kinson was sent out to purchase a considerable amount of the drug tusal. He has no idea why – Harlen never used the stuff. Kinson knew a dealer, Darrian Jak, and obtained the drug from him.
- Soon after Kinson returned, Harlen shot Backett and they fled the scene. There was no sign of an argument beforehand.
- Harlen stole two items from Backett's room – some statuette and a datatape.
- In their escape, they used a device that somehow suppressed electronic devices nearby. They just called it 'the gadget'; he doesn't know where it came from or how it works but it was one of Harlen's most prized possessions. They used the gadget on this job, too, when they were sent to assassinate Professor Ujinka.
- He has no idea why they were sent to kill some old academic but they were told to make it look like an accident and steal whatever they could from the house.
- He does not know where Harlen is based or where the stolen items are. He contacted Harlen through a contact in Startown, a Llellewyoly named Exceedingly Discreet. The Dandelion operated out of a brokerage called Winter Shipping; the password for getting to see the Dandelion is '*17 tons of flax*' – just mention that at Winter Shipping and they will let you in to see Exceedingly Discreet.

AFTERMATH

As Professor Ujinka is dead, the Travellers must turn Kinson over to the authorities or they will be suspects in the crime themselves.

It is possible, at this stage of the adventure, that the Travellers might decide to wash their hands of the whole affair and give the matter over to Chief Inspector Norrim. If they take this course, then the Ancients statuette and data tape will be lost. You can reintroduce these clues in the next part of the campagin, in Vlen Backett's cabin on Alell.

The Public Order Commission denies that they arrested Labre and say they had no grav cars in that area. In this matter, they are telling the truth; those were Imperial Intelligence agents, not POC officers.

If present, Odoy strongly advocates dealing with Ven Yasha directly, instead of going to the Public Order Commission. The Llellewyoly is his best lead for finding Ven Yasha or at least this Harlen.

STARTOWN NIGHTS

Startown. The freighters, tramp jumpers and free traders of 100 worlds end up at Regina and all their drifters and transient passengers, hitchhikers and stowaways end up here. It is a no-man's-land between cities claimed by neither the Imperium, or Credo, or the second city of Atora, a neon strip of clubs and bars, a smuggler's haven, a lawless frontier on a lawful world.

Read the following when the Travellers return to Startown:

Assiniboia is full overhead as you arrive back in Startown, glaring down at you. Somewhere in Startown, there's a Dandelion who can lead you to the murderer.

THE PLAN

The Travellers need to come up with a strategy for dealing with Harlen and Ven Yasha. What approach best suits their skills?

- **The Direct Approach:** March into Winter Shipping, force the Dandelion to tell them where Harlen is, make their way to Harlen's station and go in guns blazing to avenge Vlen Backett.
- **The Stealthy Approach:** Sneak into Winter Shipping, find out where Harlen is and then sneak onto the cargo launch that goes to Harlen's station.
- **The Deceptive Approach:** Pretend to be criminals interested in making a deal with Harlen and Ven Yasha in order to get invited to the station.
- **The Investigative Approach:** Spy on Winter Shipping, note that a launch travels from Winter Shipping to a small station in orbit. Make their way there.
- **The Devil's Bargain:** Use the captured Kinson as a bargaining chip; get the information they need in exchange for Kinson's life.

THE WORD ON THE STREETS

Travellers with the Streetwise skill or underworld connections or allies can hit the streets and pick up rumours at this point. Call for an Average (8+) Streetwise check (1D hours) and give a Traveller who succeeds a number of rolls on the Rumours table equal to the Effect of the check. The same rumour can be obtained from multiple sources.

Rumours

2D	Rumour
2	*Here's a weird tale for you. A ship showed up at the highport a few weeks ago, the* Alahir. *Registered to the Scout Service but it's not a standard scout design. The captain of the* Alahir *had a lot of meetings with Inspector Norrim and I've seen a lot of offworlders running around in POC uniforms since then.*
3	*The POC are up in arms about some Imperial police force taking over some murder inquiry. What I heard is that the guy who was killed was a Zhodani spy and the whole thing's now a matter of state security.*
4	*You know Gaius Labre? He's dead. They found his body up in the Dancado Woods. What I hear is, he crossed Ven Yasha.*
5	*Looking for work? There's good money to be made smuggling in tusal, if you've got a ship...*
6	Wild or blatantly false rumour – Ven Yasha is the Duke of Regina, there are Zhodani spies in the Highport, overdosing on tusal gives you psionic powers and so on.
7	*The Dandelion? I've heard of him. He works at Winter Shipping. Those bastards bankrupt good honest spacers. Don't go near them.*
8	*It's dangerous to ask too many questions, friend.*
9	*Winter Shipping – they're over by the Downport. Good place to go if you need a loan or if you've got a hot cargo that you need to shift before POC shows up.*
10	*Harlen? Red-haired guy, right? I've heard of Harlen. He's a fixer. Deals in smuggled goods, weapons, alien tech. He's got a base in orbit somewhere.*
11	*Ven Yasha? I've heard he travels the galaxy and that he's got organisations on every world from here to the Outrim Void. He shows up every few months and if you don't have his cut ready for him, you're dead. He's completely ruthless.*
12	*Ven Yasha's dead. It's true. Someone shot him a few weeks ago.*

HARLEN

Ven Yasha's proxy at the Regina base is Harlen, a former scientist at Kaldi Research who was recruited because of his expertise in telecommunications. Harlen suspects that Ven Yasha is in contact with 'higher powers' – either the Ancients or another super-advanced alien race – and believes that if he serves Ven Yasha with fanatic devotion, his master will one day reveal these secrets to him. Harlen is a cold individual, bordering on sociopathy. He relates poorly to other human beings, preferring the company of machines.

WINTER SHIPPING

Finding Winter Shipping is easy enough – the brokerage is located at the edge of the Imperial extraterritoriality zone; the company owns buildings on either side of the zone border and moves records and cash back and forth depending on which side is currently investigating it for fraud. The brokerage specialises in speculative traders; more accurately, it specialises in swooping in on poor merchants who are down on their luck. (*'Behind on your mortgage payments? Unable to pay your crew salaries? Unexpected repair bills beyond your means? Winter Shipping is here to "help" by buying your cargo at a massive discount, in exchange for prompt service and no questions asked.'*)

Kinson thinks that Exceedingly Discreet has criminal connections on the side and that Winter Shipping is a legitimate business. In fact, Winter Shipping is owned by Harlen. There are three members of staff at the downport side – Exceedingly Discreet itself, the broker Marid and warehouse manager/security guard Olso. Exceedingly Discreet keeps track of shipping and spots potential opportunities for the company; Marid actually makes the deals and Olso transfers cargoes to the warehouse. The company also has a small station in orbit, where Harlen keeps 'hot' goods. A cargo launch travels between the starport and Harlen's station as needed.

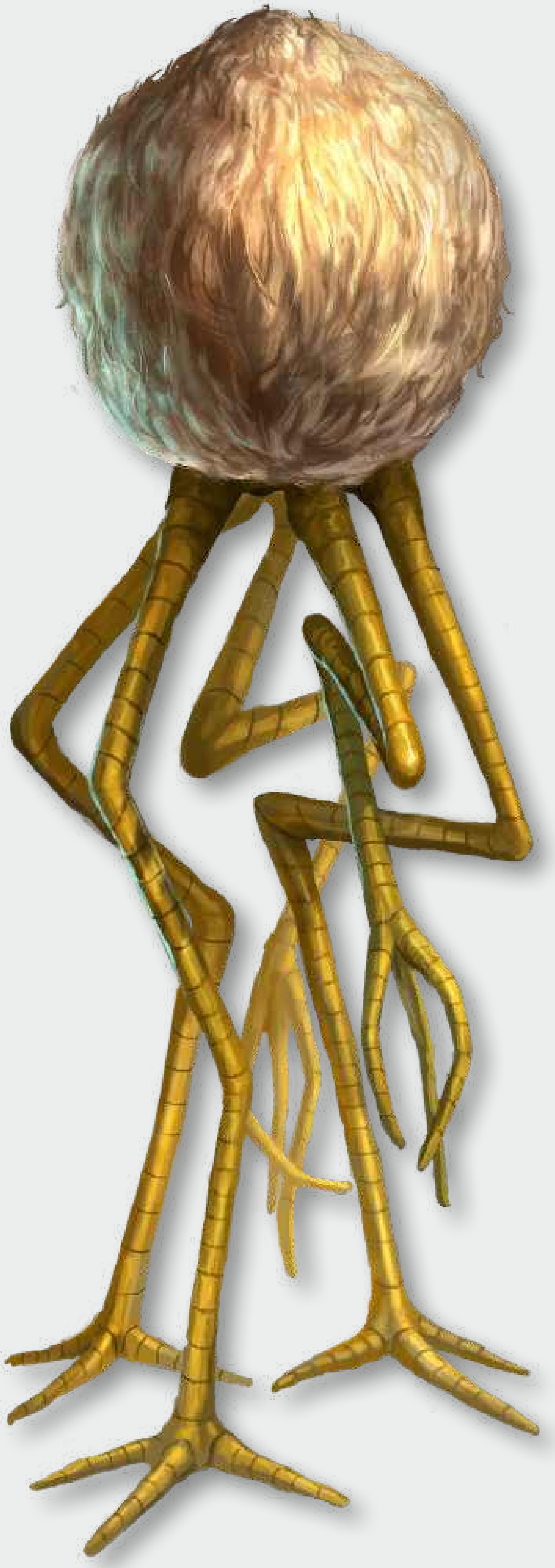
EXCEEDINGLY DISCREET

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Llellewyoly	Unknown	Unknown

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	9	Admin 3, Broker 2, Electronics (comms) 1, Electronics (computers) 2, Steward 1, Streetwise 1
DEX	8	EDU	11	
END	4	SOC	4	
EQUIPMENT			**Armour:** Protective Environment Suit (+1)	

Playing Exceedingly Discreet:

- Hold yourself upright. Extend your arm towards whoever you are speak to.
- Address everyone by their full title at all times. Invent titles if they do not have formal ones. (‘*Yes, Overly Talkative Navigator...*’)
- Try to find logical contradictions and holes in whatever the Travellers say. Nit-pick mercilessly.
- Never raise your voice or speak in anything other than a gentle, lyrical tone.



One of only a handful of Dandelions (properly called a Llellewyoly) on Regina, Exceedingly Discreet delights in playing games. It has only a limited conception of human legal systems, or finance for that matter. It considers its job within Winter Shipping to be part of a great game, where staying one step ahead of the authorities and finding potential opportunities for the firm are both part of the fun. Employing the Dandelion lets Harlen keep all sorts of potentially embarrassing or illegal information off the computer system; Exceedingly Discreet’s alien brain contains thousands of records on criminal activity and Ven Yasha’s activities.

Exceedingly Discreet sleeps in a chamber above its office (‘sleeps’ is technically a misnomer but it enters a nocturnal dormancy phase and embeds itself in a nest during this time, withdrawing its tentacles into its body.)

MADRID

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	28

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	8	Admin 1, Carouse 3, Deception 2, Gun Combat 0, Persuade 2, Streetwise 1
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	5	SOC	5	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Stunner (2D, Stun, Zero-G)

The 'receptionist', Marid is a sultry woman with the charms of a noble consort and the legal mind of a piranha. Let your guard down around her and she will convince you to sign over your cargo, your ship and your firstborn children to her. She is Harlen's protégée – he intends for her to take on a bigger role in their criminal organisation in time to come.

OLSO

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	40

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	12	INT	3	Athletics (strength) 2, Mechanic 1, Melee (bludgeon) 2, Melee (unarmed) 1, Pilot (small craft) 1, Streetwise 1, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	5	EDU	5	
END	10	SOC	4	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Club (2D)5)

Olso is an ex-convict; he spent 12 years in a prison on another of Assiniboia's moons, doing hard labour in a 1.86g environment. He is a formidable hand-to-hand combatant but slow to react. He calls Marid or Exceedingly Discreet when confused.

The Winter Shipping Facility: The facility consists of three buildings. There is a small office in Startown itself, where Marid works, and another small office on the starport side, where the Dandelion monitors shipping. These two offices are connected by a secret passage that runs under the downport fence, allowing the company to move goods across the extraterritoriality line without starport customs noticing. Also on the starport side is a small warehouse, where Olso works. Near the warehouse, the company keeps a 20-ton launch for surface-to-orbit transfers.

INVESTIGATIONS AT WINTER SHIPPING

The Travellers may wish to investigate Winter Shipping before approaching Exceedingly Discreet.

Business Reputation: An Average (8+) Broker or Streetwise check (1D hours, INT) will reveal that Winter Shipping has a reputation for predatory business practices. Usually, they buy cargoes from desperate merchants but they sometimes deal in smuggling or stolen goods.

Casing the Office: A Difficult (10+) Recon check (1D hours, INT) reveals there are two Winter Shipping offices; one is on the Startown side of the downport, the other is on the far side of the fence. The starport one is closed; there is a sign on the door redirecting people to the Startown branch. There must be a secret passage between the two buildings, however – the Travellers see Olso enter the starport office and come out at the Startown side.

Hacking: A Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check (1D hours, EDU) reveals the company's security system is not that hard to crack but the computer system has next to nothing of interest. They must have a separate server with the really juicy files, which is not connected to the network. The Traveller does find a roster and flight plan for cargo flights; the launch travels between the highport and Regina Down every few days but some of the flights take several hours longer than they should – the launch must be taking a detour somewhere in orbit.

Security Systems: A Difficult (10+) Investigate or Electronics (computers or sensors) check (1D hours, INT) reveals that the office's security systems are not especially impressive; it should be easy enough to shut down the alarms and break in. Actually deactivating the alarms requires an Average (8+) Electronics (computers or sensors) check (1D minutes, INT). If a Traveller tries to disable the alarms without first examining the security system, it is a Very Difficult (12+) check instead.

MAKING THE APPROACH

If the Travellers enter via the Startown office, read the following:

The inside of the Winter Shipping office is a lot more impressive than its unprepossessing exterior. You could be in the lobby of a high-class corporate office. The floor is polished marble; the walls are decorated with holos of shining merchant ships in flight. The one slightly incongruous element is the well-stocked minibar in one corner. Sitting behind a desk is a stunningly beautiful woman, who smiles warmly as you enter.

'I am Marid. How may I serve you?' she purrs.

Marid will try to pump the Travellers for information about who they are and what they want. Initially, she will deny any knowledge of Harlen and mentioning Ven Yasha's name will instantly put her on her guard.

If they use the passphrase given by Kinson, then she presses a hidden control in her desk and one section of the marble floor slides open, revealing a ramp. *'Just proceed down the tunnel. Exceedingly Discreet is waiting at the far side.'*

The ramp leads to a tunnel that runs under the starport fence. It was originally a utility duct and there are still old pipes embedded in the concrete walls. Halfway along the tunnel is a door into a storeroom. Currently, the storeroom is empty except for a pair of old gin bottles and a crate of Llellewyoly food.

Call for Recon rolls as the Travellers proceed down the corridor; those who succeed notice that one of the pipes is much newer than the others. This pipe has concealed gas vents along its length.

If Marid suspects the Travellers, she activates a security system while the Travellers are in the tunnel. Read the following:

The ramp at the end of the tunnel slams shut – and so does the ramp at the far end. You are trapped. A voice echoes down the tunnel from a hidden speaker. 'Ok, talk fast or I'll flood the tunnel with poison gas. Who are you and what do you want?'

Marid is not bluffing; at the flick of a switch, she can pump an anaesthetic gas into the tunnel, knocking the Travellers unconscious. If she suspects they are POC agents or another threat to Harlen, she interrogates the Travellers, then gasses them. Quick-witted Travellers may be able to talk Marid into letting them see Exceedingly Discreet.

GAS ATTACK

Travellers in the tunnel when the gas is released must make an END check each round. In the first round, the difficulty for the check is Easy (4+), in the second round it is Routine (6+), then Average (8+), Difficult (10+) and so on. Failing the END check means the Traveller falls unconscious. If the entire group is knocked out, then they are brought to Ven Yasha's station for interrogation.

A Traveller may make a Very Difficult (-4) Mechanic check (1D rounds, EDU) to disable the gas vents.

Note that Exceedingly Discreet is immune to the effects of the gas.

RAISING THE ALARM

If the Travellers try to break into Winter Shipping, or if they threaten the staff, then the alarm is raised. As soon as the siren sounds, Olso runs from the warehouse to wherever the alarm was triggered, while Exceedingly Discreet retreats into the tunnel. Marid remains in the front office but readies her stunner if required.

The Starport Police arrive 2D minutes after the alarm is raised. Marid or Exceedingly Discreet can shut down the alarm if convinced the threat has passed. The alarm will also be shut down if there are illegal goods on the premises that are not hidden in the concealed tunnel.

At the far end of the tunnel is an identical concealed ramp, leading to the starport office.

Via the Starport: The starport side office of Winter Shipping is shut, with a sign instructing visitors to go around to the Startown office (only a few dozen metres as the grav-belt flies but getting there requires a long walk along the fence, passing through the security checkpoint and then another long walk back down the street). The door is locked and alarmed. Olso, Marid and Exceedingly Discreet have passcards.

If the Travellers try forcing this door, the alarm will be raised. No new business is conducted via this office; it is only used for smuggling or dealing with existing clients.

Breaking & Entering: The Travellers may prefer to break into the office at night; to do so successfully, they have to overcome the security system. Finding the control to open the secret passage requires a Very Difficult (12+) Investigate check (1D minutes, INT).

CONVERSATIONS WITH EXCEEDINGLY DISCREET

When the Travellers meet Exceedingly Discreet, read the following:

The Llellewyoly unfolds like a blossoming plant, unfurling long sensory-tubules in your direction. Through its translucent environment suit, strange colours play over its central mass and it activates a small communications device attached to its central stem. In a musical voice it says 'I am Exceedingly Discreet. What is your title at this time, strangers?'

Exceedingly Discreet controls access to Harlen; criminal business proposals and other offers are vetted by the Dandelion before being passed on. If the Travellers want Exceedingly Discreet to refer them to Harlen, they need to convince the alien that they have something to offer. Exceedingly Discreet will question them extensively on their proposal.

Alternatively, they can tell the truth about why they are here. Exceedingly Discreet is also ambitious and covets Harlen's position. If the Travellers tell Exceedingly Discreet about the botched assassination of Professor Ujinka and that they can tie Harlen to the killing of Vlen Backett, they can convince the alien that Harlen is making poor decisions and needs to be replaced.

The Dandelion speaks evasively about almost every topic but the Travellers can extract the following information:

Harlen: He is really just a caretaker, who keeps the Regina operation ticking over when Ven Yasha is not present. Exceedingly Discreet considers Harlen to be short-sighted and a poor tactician; his one saving grace is that he is extremely loyal.

Ven Yasha: The mysterious master of the organisation. Exceedingly Discreet has never met Ven Yasha but respects him deeply. The Dandelion believes that Ven Yasha must be a powerful precognitive or else has contacts in the very highest levels of the Imperium; how else could he have such influence and reach?

Kinson: The Dandelion dismisses Kinson and Labre as 'Blunt instruments. Disposable thugs.'

Professor Ujinka: Ven Yasha ordered her death. It makes no sense. The value of Ancients artefacts is enhanced by greater understanding of Ancients technology.

Imperial Intelligence: Exceedingly Discreet is aware that Imperial Intelligence agents are on Regina. The *Alahir* recently departed the system; Gand Holcess is the captain of that ship. The purpose of the visit is a mystery to Exceedingly Discreet but it suspects that Holcess holds a special portfolio within the intelligence services, most likely to do with existential threats to the Imperium.

Vlen Backett: Exceedingly Discreet believes Backett is a messenger for Ven Yasha; it has correlated orders from Ven Yasha with visits by Backett. Presumably, he was killed because he brought bad news. It knows that Harlen retrieved a statuette and a data tape from Backett's room in the hostel. These items were transported to Harlen's station.

GETTING TO THE STATION

The final part of this mission takes place on Harlen's secret orbital base. How do the Travellers get there?

- Exceedingly Discreet can either give them the co-ordinates of the base or else send them there on Winter Shipping's launch.
- They can stow away on board the launch.
- If the Travellers track the movements of the launch, they can locate the secret base and travel there themselves.
- Winter Shipping staff incapacitated by the knock-out gas may be taken there for interrogation. In this case, they wake up just as the launch is approaching the station.

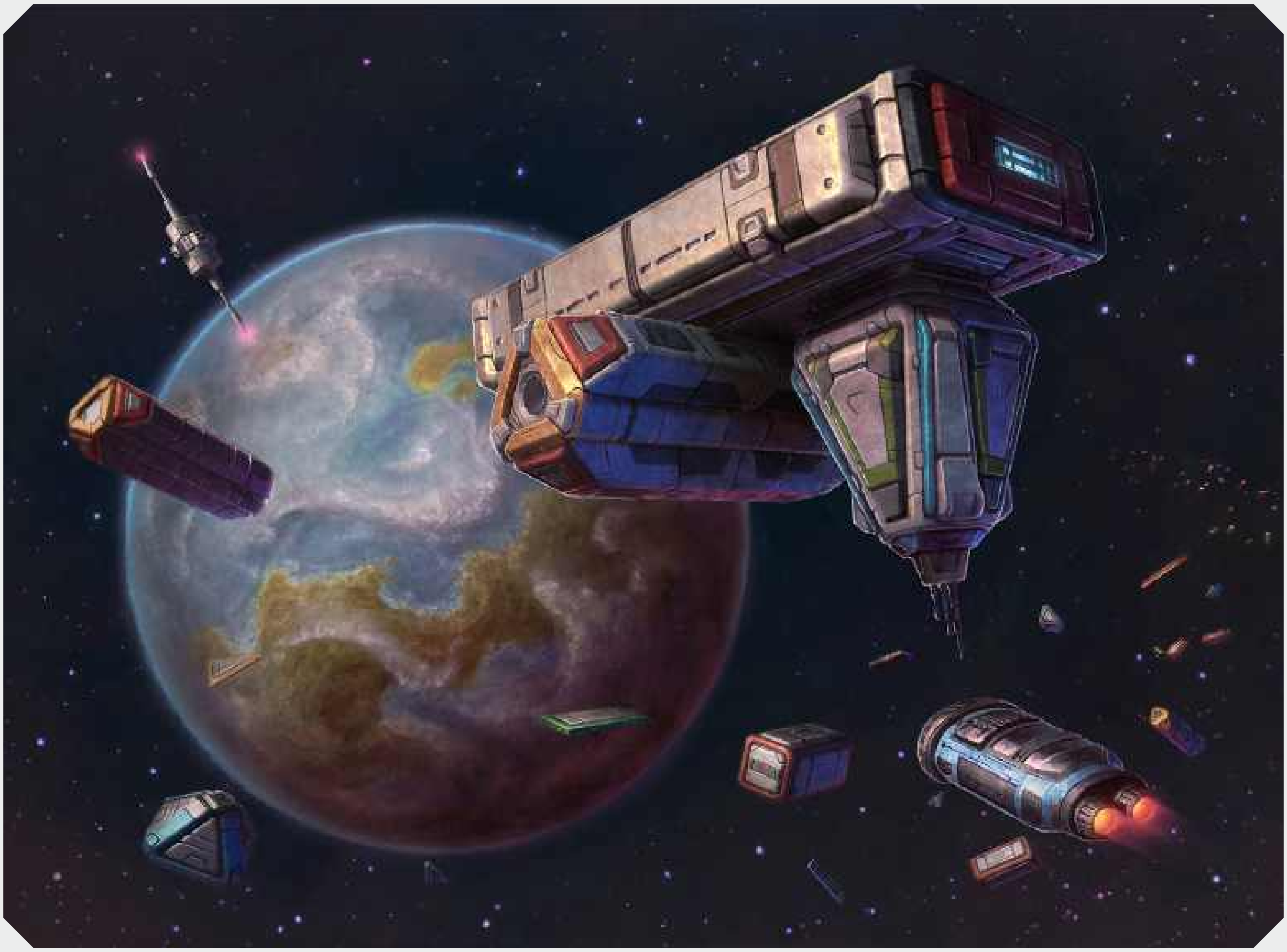
VEN YASHA'S STATION

The corporate megafreighters that make the lonely trek across the Corridor sector carry their cargoes in gigantic shipping containers, some of which are hundreds of d-tons. The smaller freighters and tramp ships that convey this cargo from Regina to the frontier worlds cannot handle these huge containers; much of the work done at the Regina Highport involves breaking cargo down into smaller loads. Empty containers are either filled with goods for export back to the core worlds... but there is not always sufficient cargo to justify sending a fully loaded megafreighter back again, so a percentage of cargo containers are left behind at Regina. These unused bulk containers are towed to a holding depot in a higher orbit, waiting for the day they are needed again. Some have been waiting for centuries.

The container yard is a maze of floating containers and navigation buoys. Few ships ever visit here, except for the tugs and shepherds that keep the containers in position, and scavengers hoping to find abandoned cargo or scrap metal. The whole zone is considered hazardous, due to the sheer number of containers and other debris floating in space.

Hidden amid this maze is Ven Yasha's station. A bribe paid to a long-dead shipping clerk meant that three large containers were removed from the starport's database. Over the years, these containers have been transformed into a hidden space station, a smuggler's base within short reach of one of the busiest starports in the sector. From the outside, the station looks like three shipping containers lashed together – the docking ports, station-keeping thrusters and defence turrets are all concealed.

The station's primary purpose is supporting smuggling; goods are stored in the station's vaults before being transferred to the highport or the surface. The money from smuggling funds other schemes on behalf of Vlen Backett's Ancient master, such as monitoring the Regina communications networks for clues and rumours about other Ancients. The station has a cutting-edge interception system, capable of tapping into even coded Imperial transmissions.



VEN YASHA'S STATION

SPACE STATION

A bribe paid to a long-dead shipping clerk meant that three large containers were removed from the Regina starport's database. Over the years, these containers have been transformed into a hidden space station, a smuggler's base within short reach of one of the busiest starports in the sector. From the outside, the station looks like three shipping containers lashed together – the docking ports, station-keeping thrusters and defence turrets are all concealed.

TL10		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	150 tons, Standard (100 tons non-gravity)	—	5
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 2	3.75	0.5
M-Drive	Thrust 0	0.375	0.375
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 60	6	3
Fuel Tanks	8 weeks operation	1	—
Bridge		10	0.2
Computer	Computer/5	—	0.03
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
Weapons	Pop-up Double Turret (pulse Lasers)	2	3.5
Systems	Docking Space (20 tons)	22	5.5
	Heavy Grappling arm	6	3
	Cargo Crane	3	3
Software	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
Staterooms	Standard x4	16	2
Common Areas	Briefing Room/Office	4	0.5
Cargo		69.875	—

Crew:

Engineer, Maintenance, Gunner

Hull: 60

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr2634/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr31.608

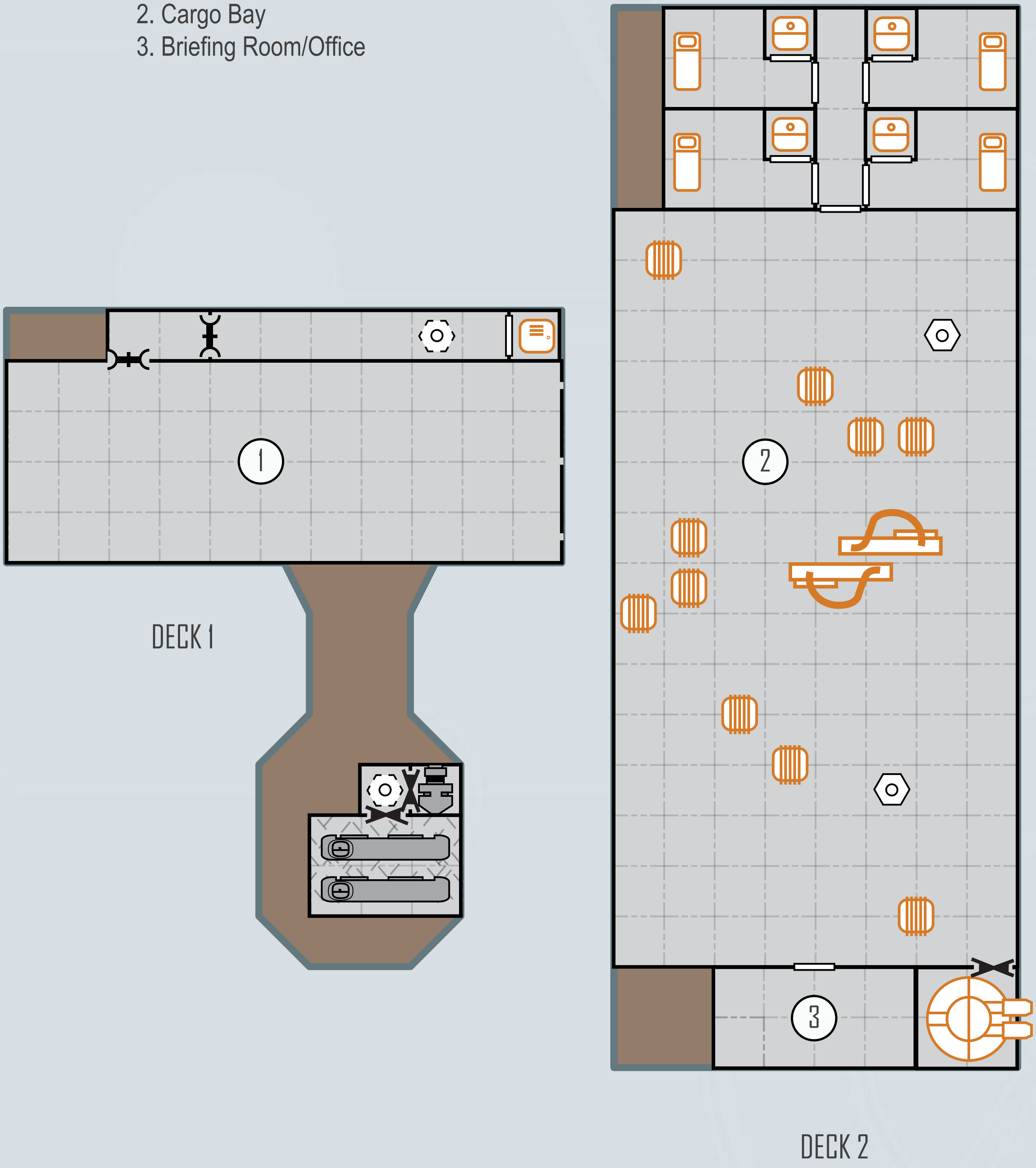
Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	30
Manoeuvre Drive	15
Sensors	4
Weapons	9

Ven Yasha's Station

Ven Yasha's Station

1. Launch Docking Space
2. Cargo Bay
3. Briefing Room/Office


1
DECK 1
2
3
DECK 2

GETTING TO THE STATION

If the Travellers are on board the Winter Shipping launch (either as passengers, stowaways or prisoners), read the following:

The launch does not head for the highport; instead, it heads out of Regina's atmosphere on a course for a Lagrangian point between the moon and gas giant. Due to the gravitational intricacies of the Assiniboia system, the point is only semi-stable but anything left there should remain in place for several years. As you get closer, you see a constellation of metallic objects glittering in the sunlight; cargo containers, thousands of them. Most are docked into long lines and cubes but a few are drifting free and untethered. The launch weaves around these obstacles and goes into the heart of the container yard. You pass by navbuoys and warning beacons before coming to a trio of old containers.

The launch dips under the containers and comes to a halt. You drift closer and closer to the corrugated metal... and then a concealed hatch in the container opens and the launch docks. The hatch smoothly closes beneath the keel of the launch. You are in.

If, however, the Travellers are following the launch or tracked its movements, read the following instead:

The launch's course takes it to a container storage yard orbiting Regina. The yard is full of abandoned shipping containers, kept here until they can be reused or repurposed. It is a big space of empty metal boxes, and you pick up signals from automated warning buoys informing you it is a navigational hazard and that you are not to enter the yard without permission.

Following the launch's course leads you to a trio of linked containers. There's no sign of the launch – but a detailed sensor scan of the container picks up what could be a concealed docking port. As you scan the container, a hatch in its side opens and a turret rises out. Twin pulse lasers swivel around to target you.

INSIDE THE STATION

The station is divided into three sections – the port container, middle container and starboard container. There are small airlocks linking each of the containers to the next. These airlocks can be overridden with an Average (+0) Mechanic check (1D minutes, INT) and there are security cameras at each airlock. The whole station is made of scavenged industrial parts and prefabricated components; chains and cables hang from the ceilings, the lights flicker in time with the stutter of the power plant and the air smells of oil and burnt wiring.

Only the middle container has gravity (1g standard); the port and starboard containers do not have artificial gravity.

The port container is where smuggled goods are stored and it is all most visitors to the station ever see. The lower half of the container is an unpressurised docking space; the upper half is a cargo hold. A cargo airlock connects the two halves.

The middle container is the station's operations centre. On the middle level, connecting to the other two containers, is a long corridor connecting to living quarters, life support and other basic facilities. The lower section of the middle container contains a small fusion power plant to power the station and the defence turret. There are also four re-entry capsules. The upper section of the container is Harlen's office and living quarters.

Finally, the starboard container has the station's computer core and the communications interception technology. If the Travellers examine this Electronics (comms or computers), they quickly realise the scale and complexity of the monitoring equipment. The interception device is *at least* TL14 and parts of it are in advance of anything that the Travellers have even heard of (TL16 or more!). The interceptor can not only eavesdrop on every communication that goes through Regina, it can decrypt the Imperium's most secure messages.

THE CREW

In addition to Harlen, there are 1D+2 other crew on board at any time, mostly smugglers who use the station as a base (and also pass on rumours and intelligence information to Ven Yasha's organisation). These crewmembers wear vacc suits and carry sidearms while on board the station. None are permitted to enter the starboard container.

SMUGGLER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	5	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Gunner (turret) 1, Recon 1
DEX	6	EDU	7	
END	8	SOC	4	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Snub Pistol (3D-3, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+8)

GETTING TO HARLEN

The Travellers' route to Harlen depends on how they got to the station.

As Prisoners: The Travellers are taken at gunpoint by the station crew up to Harlen's office. Once Harlen realises who the Travellers are, he has them returned to the surface immediately before activating the station's self-destruct.

As Guests: The Travellers are escorted to Harlen's office by guards. Whatever their proposal is, Harlen rejects it, claiming that the organisation is 'in transition' and cannot undertake any new criminal schemes at the time. When Harlen recognises the Travellers, he activates the self-destruct.

Sneaking In: When the shuttle docks, the crew unload its cargo through the cargo airlock. Travellers can either ambush the crew or sneak out via the airlock. From the main cargo bay in the port container, the Travellers can either open the airlock into the central container or cut through the walls. Alternatively, they could disguise themselves as guards.

Boarding Action: Once the Travellers have disabled the defence turret, they can storm the station by cutting through the walls or storming the airlock. Alternatively, Harlen can contact their ship via a video link and the confrontation between the Travellers and Harlen can take place remotely.

CONFRONTING HARLEN

Read the following:

Harlen's office resembles a scientist's workroom more than the lair of a murderous criminal. He peers at you from behind a desktop terminal; around him are smaller screens displaying some sort of technical readouts and communications logs. There is a curious piece of statuary on the desk, resembling a winged pillar, alongside data tapes. Harlen himself is small and slight, with reddish hair that flops over his pale eyes. The lethal-looking gauss pistol holstered at his side is an odd contrast to his demeanour.

Harlen considers most of Regina's criminal fraternity to be beneath contempt and he has no time for the posturing, threats and bravado that are part of most criminal negotiations. He prefers to speak directly and concisely.

Stolen Goods: The statuette and data tapes stolen from Vlen Backett's hostel room are on Harlen's desk in plain view. The statuette is of Ancients origin; the tapes describe how it was found in the Boughene system by a trader back in 703. For more on these tapes, see page 38.

The complication: When communications interception showed that Imperial Intelligence suspected Vlen Backett, Harlen suggested 'killing' Vlen. This would throw Gand Holcess off the trail, and let Vlen report to his superiors back on Alell. The Travellers, knowing nothing about Backett's true identity, would serve as couriers. The whole scheme is predicated on the Vlen identity remaining completely separate from that of Ven Yasha.

Now, through Professor Ujinka and the botched assassination, the Travellers are very close to tying Backett to Ven Yasha – and if they can do it, so can Imperial Intelligence. Once Imperial Intelligence discovers the station, then the whole conspiracy collapses; they will find the communications interception array. Harlen cannot allow this to happen.

As soon as the Travellers reveal themselves, or as soon as Harlen realises who they are, he uses his neural comm to activate the self-destruct sequence (if the Travellers are prisoners, then he first orders the guards to send them back to the surface in the launch). Read the following:

'Oh. Hmm.'

Harlen blinks twice. 'This is... suboptimal.' He closes his eyes and concentrates for a second. All the screens around him go black. Somewhere far below, a synthesised voice announces 'destruct sequence activated. Detonation imminent. All hands to re-entry capsules.'

HARLEN

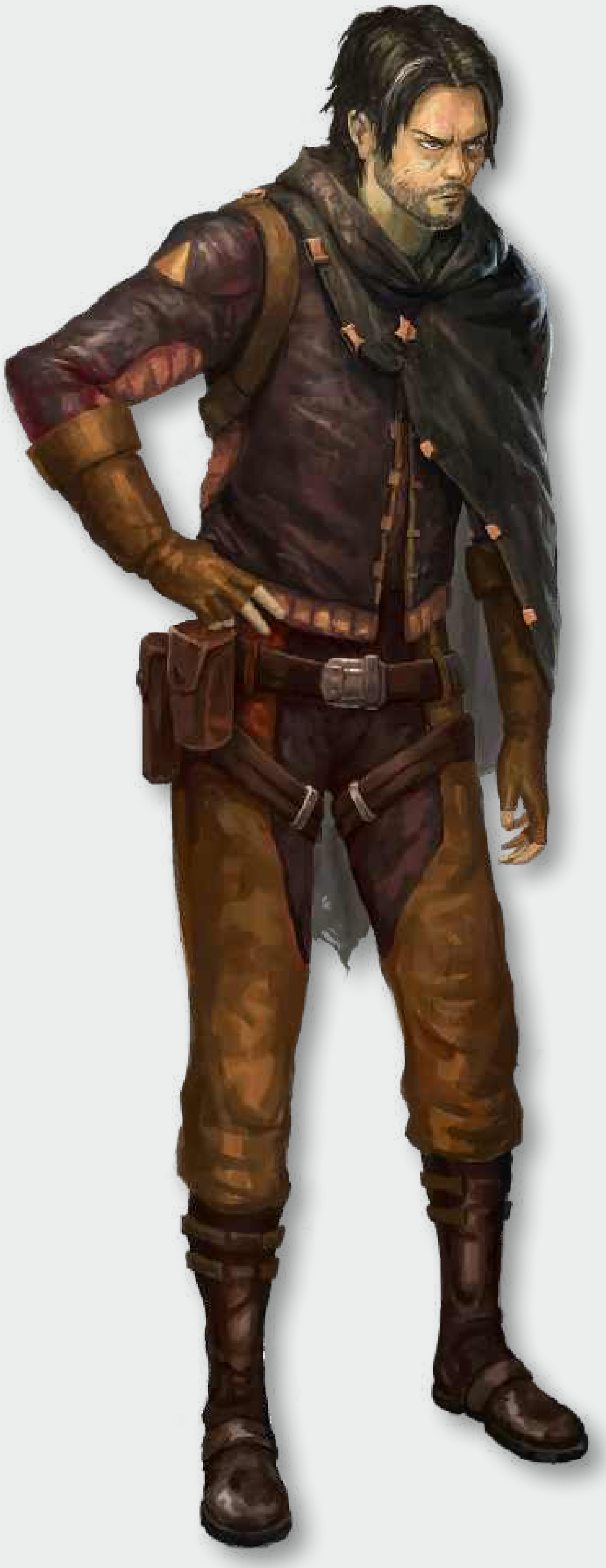
SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	39

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	**INT**	11	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Athletics (dexterity) 1, Electronics (comms) 4, Electronics (computers) 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer 0, Gun Combat 0, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	7	**EDU**	11	
END	6	**SOC**	8	

EQUIPMENT	Neural Comm (TL14), Wafer Jack (TL13) **Weapons:** Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+8)

Playing Harlen:

- Look at everyone like they are samples under a microscope. Blink as little as possible.
- Say exactly what you mean. Do not prevaricate.
- All other sophonts are morons. Most are useless morons; a small few, like Exceedingly Discreet, are useful morons. The only thing you respect is superior technology.
- Ven Yasha is your connection to this superior technology; you believe that if you serve him loyally, the secrets of the universe will be revealed to you – and you will do *anything* to win that prize. Smuggling, spying, murder, genocide... all these are crimes on a *human* scale. You aspire to the cosmic.



'This is not the end' mutters Harlen. He slumps against the wall, refusing to move. His expression is unreadable in the light of the self-destruct countdown.

SELF-DESTRUCT

The station explodes within three minutes of Harlen's command. During this time, the Travellers need to fight their way past panicked guards and smugglers, and find their way either to an airlock, a re-entry capsule or the launch.

Self-Destruct Sequence

Round	Event
1	Self-destruct sequence begins.
5	Computer archives are erased.
10	The smugglers head towards the re-entry capsules and launch.
15	Gravity shuts down.
20	Lights shut down.
25	Airlocks open; the station begins to decompress.
30	The station explodes.

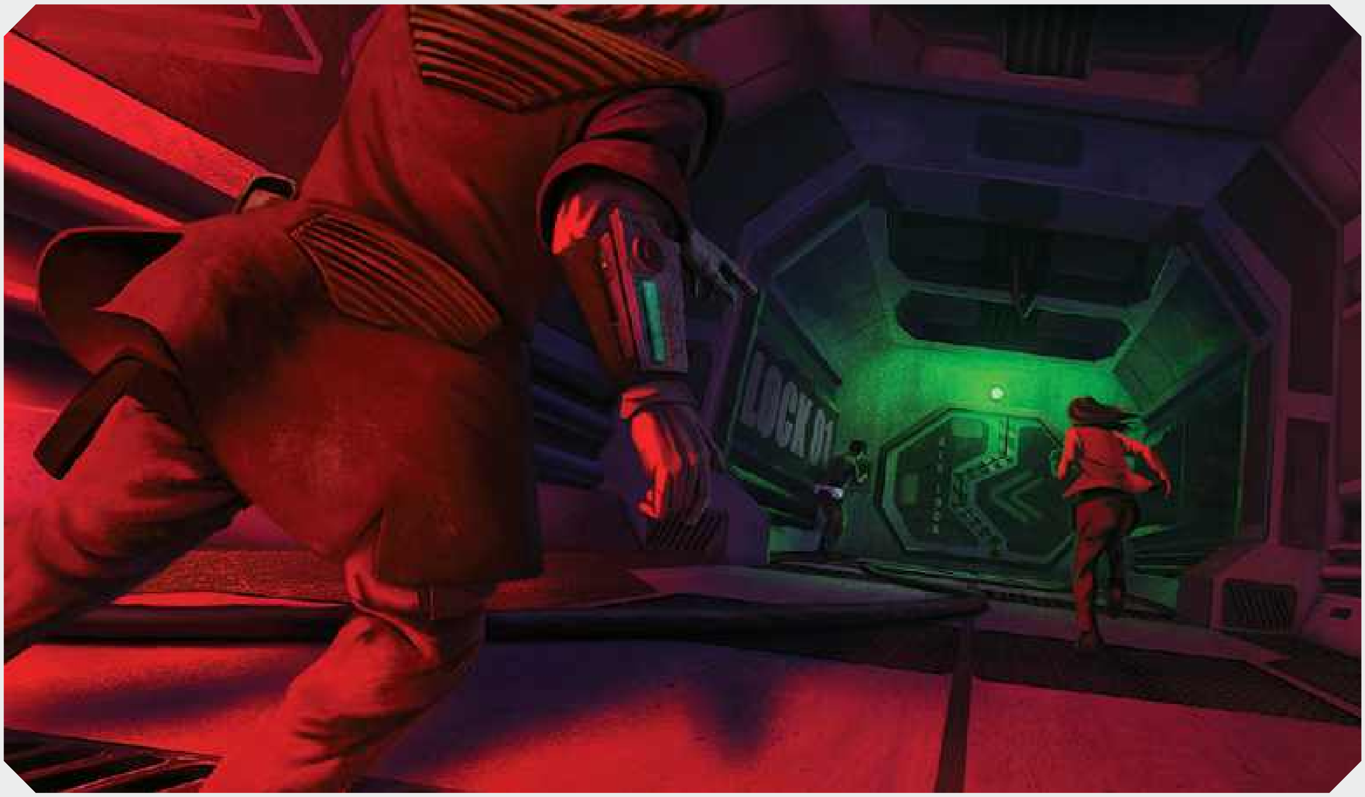
Do not run this scene as a conventional fight scene; it is a chaotic scramble for a way off the station. Throw in secondary explosions, sudden bursts of fire from smugglers, random fluctuations in the station's gravity and other complications. The Travellers should feel like they are fleeing barely ahead of impending doom.

Remember that Travellers suffer penalties in the port or starboard sections of the station, or in the middle section once gravity fails.

Harlen wants the Travellers to escape but if they do die here, then the job of transporting Backett's corpse back to Alell will just fall onto some other relative. The Travellers' deaths are not, to use Harlen's terminology, an optimal outcome but they are an acceptable one. However, he does not want any of the other crew to escape, as the smugglers know too much. Therefore, the only re-entry capsule that works is the one the Travellers take. As they flee the station, they will see the other capsules are locked in place. Alternatively, the Travellers can head to the launch and use that to fly back to the surface, or grab vacc suits and hurl themselves out of an airlock. With a big enough jump, the Travellers can push themselves out of range of the explosion.

BRINGING THE BODY HOME

Back on Regina, the Travellers are at a dead end. With Harlen's death, they have no more leads in the investigation of Vlen Backett's death. They could possibly pursue Professor Ujinka's aide, Juni, on Beck's World but first they must return Backett's corpse to Alell...



HOMECOMING

On Alell, ferocity and beauty are inextricably entwined. The jungles shimmer a thousand shades of red and gold but touch the wrong delicate frond with bare skin and a poison stinger will lash out faster than the eye can follow. The Alellian whisperhawk is beautiful even as it stoops on its prey from the green clouds. Even the sky of Alell is perilous; the shimmering auroras that stream across the heavens are caused by bursts of radiation from the primary star.

The planet was settled in the dying days of the First Imperium. It became fashionable for nobles to hunt the whisperhawk, the malificient, the vicious glittering lambdragon. They opened hunting lodges in the most scenic locations on the planet – atop the perilous glacial cliffs, in the heart of the Dranxi Jungle, in the savannah hunting grounds of the ferocious cadegeree. Each lodge had a staff of technicians, groundskeepers and servants to attend to every whim of the degenerate nobility.

And then the First Imperium collapsed.

Several hundred years later, when Alell was re-contacted by explorers from the resurgent Imperium, the descendants of those hotel porters and safari guides survived to form a civilisation centred around those hunting lodges. The lodges are now walled cities, keeping out the lethal jungles...

— Checking In Indefinitely: A History of Alell, *Tharsis Djar, Alell Free Press, 1101*

The Travellers arrive on Alell with Backett's body and bring it to the isolated village of Vaca Goya. There, they become enmeshed in a Backett family drama; one side of the family claims that Backett promised his starship to them, another that Backett owes them a fortune and a third group argues Backett was a member of their cult and that he signed everything over to them. As the Travellers are courted by these factions, a strange woman arrives, claiming to be Backett's wife. She is Arisa, an agent of Imperial Intelligence.

Backett's will is missing but there may be a copy in Backett's old lodge in the jungle. After the funeral (or earlier, if they choose), the Travellers are sent to search the lodge for the will. This requires travelling through the dangerous jungles of Alell. After dealing with the native wildlife, the Travellers find the lodge – and the secret hangar beneath it.

In the hangar is Vlen's old spacecraft, the *Star Hunter*, with information confirming he is involved in an alien conspiracy. Arisa calls in Imperial Intelligence and marines are dropped onto the lodge. The only way to escape is to take the *Star Hunter* and flee the system...

THE STATUE AND TAPES

Before his death, Vlen Backett acquired a curious statue, resembling a winged pillar made of a substance like ivory. It was recovered from a trader in the Boughene system centuries ago. The statue is of unknown, possibly Ancients origin but it appears to be a work of art, not a technological device.

The tapes describe how the trader found the statue on a metal-rich asteroid in orbit of the system's gas giant; they also note problems with the ship's transmissions in the G-band, just as Professor Ujinka theorised occurring in the vicinity of an Ancients site. This is a clue that the Travellers should search the Boughene system for relics left by the Ancients.

There is also a note from Vlen, reminding him to acquire the professor's G-band sensor system and use it to scan the Boughene system.

If the Travellers did not find the tapes in Bodysnatchers, they can still find this clue. While the statue is lost if they did not recover it from Regina, they can find a copy of the tapes in Backett's lodge.

ARRIVAL ON ALELL

Read the following to the Travellers:

From Regina, you travelled along the Spinward Main towards Alell. It is a lonely trek – there is a string of systems between Regina and Alell where there are no starports worth a damn, so you fall into a routine. Jump in, scoop fuel from the gas giant (or refuel at an automated hydrogen harvester station in orbit), turn over and fly out to the jump limit again. Repeat at the next system. Every day is the same, until it seems that your existence is as static and unchanging as that of the corpse in the cargo hold.

Finally, you jump into the Alell system. Your ship's sensors crackle under the buffeting of radiation from the system's sun; Alell orbits an angry, energetic star. You spin down into the planet's shadow to spare your hull. Beneath, you can see the vibrant golds and reds of the jungles that cover most of the land area. In a few spots, you can make out densely packed lights – the walled resorts of Alell.

THE RESORTS

Alell has no real highport – there is a cargo handling station in orbit, a medical facility and a rapid-response emergency services station for rescuing those lost in the jungle but none of these receive visiting ships. The Travellers must land at Alell's starport, a cavernous building that looks more like a Mayan temple than a landing site for spaceships. The starport is a gigantic artificial cavern, big enough to swallow a warship. As the Travellers' ship enters the cave, it is sprayed with jets of chemical disinfectants and bathed in strong UV light as part of Alell's biological control protocols. The supporting pillars and walls are decorated with First Imperium friezes and bas-reliefs, testament to thousands of years of settlement here on Alell. Most of the art depicts the wildlife of the planet.

Before leaving the starport, the Travellers must pass through customs. Alell's wealth is its biosphere and so the planetary administration has instituted strict protocols to ensure that some alien insect or disease does not run rampant in the jungle. Importing lifeforms from offworld is forbidden. All visitors are tested, probed, scanned and disinfected before being allowed out in Alell; those with any form of genetic engineering, augmentation or other potential biological threat to the biosphere are forced to wear environmental suits while on Alell. Non-human sophonts and even some minor races of Humaniti are also classified as 'potential hazards' and so must wear suits. Only 'pure' Vilani and Solomani can walk openly on Alell. The environmental suits are a lightweight khaki-coloured overgarment, coupled with a light helmet that keeps airborne contamination to a minimum. The resemblance to a Victorian explorer in a pith helmet can be blamed on Solomani traditionalists.

Weapons are equally restricted on Alell. The only weapon that is permitted is the mister, a gas-based weapon that sprays a haze of caustic chemicals. All known species on Alell are harmlessly repelled by the mister chemicals. The mister spray is mildly damaging to human skin.

Technically, the Travellers are importing biological matter onto Alell, in the form of Vlen Backett's corpse. The customs official insists on scanning the corpse; when they do so, their sensors momentarily fail to register the corpse and they have to repeat the scan. They blame this on a systems glitch but it is actually because of the Ancients technology that is preserving Backett's mind.

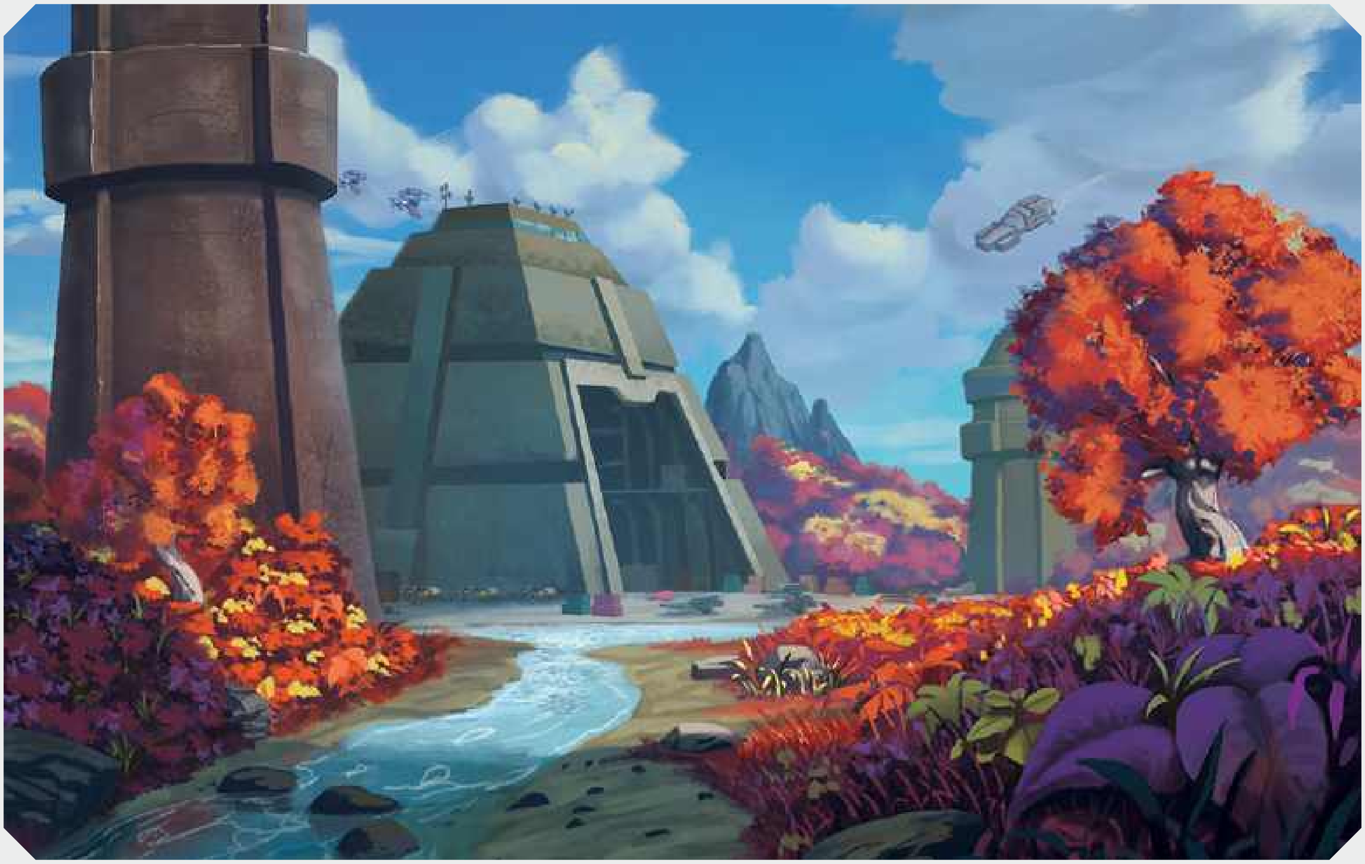
Beyond the starport, in the city of Alell Startown, the Travellers can purchase passage to the small town of Vaca Goya. The usual method of travel on Alell is by flyer; the flyers carry built-in misters to drive off whisperhawks and other avians. If the Travellers have their own spacecraft, they must leave it in the starport.

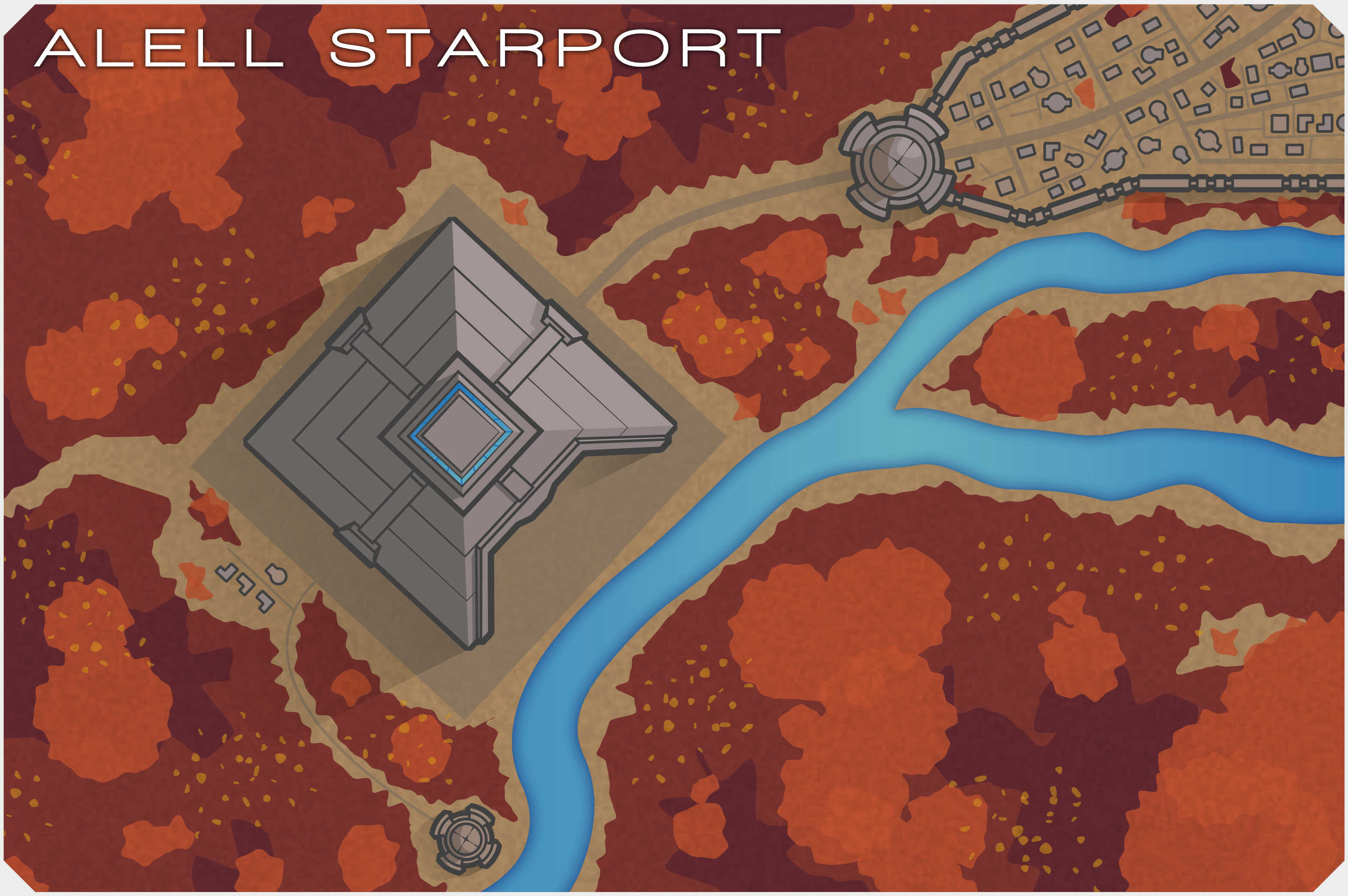
THE JUNGLE

The major settlements on Alell are either along the coast, or behind walls. There are smaller settlements, such as Vaca Goya but they are relatively uncommon. The jungles of Alell are a perilous place to live.

The pilot of the shuttle is a woman named Rao; she can give the Travellers an introduction to Alell if they have not been here before. She knew Vlen Backett slightly but does not have a high opinion of him. He always struck her as too secretive and aloof. In Alell's jungles, family and friends must come first. The place is too dangerous for lone travellers, so you must be able to trust your companions. For example, if the thrusters or mist sprayers on this flyer failed, then she would probably never make it to safety, so she has to be able to trust the mechanics back at Startown, or the flyer dispatcher at the control tower. Everyone on Alell learns to stick close – but she never got the feeling that Backett trusted anyone.

Once, Backett hired her to take him into the middle of the jungle. She does not know what he wanted out there but she dropped him off with a mister and picked him up a week later. She admits that he was certainly a brave man.




ALELL STARPORT

RAO

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	33

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	3	INT	9	Flyer (grav) 2, Gun Combat 0, Mechanic 1, Navigation 2, Survival 1
DEX	7	EDU	7	
END	9	SOC	5	

During the flight to Vaca Goya, the Travellers have excellent views of the jungle through the chemical mists. It is a trackless wilderness, reminiscent of the Jurassic period on Earth. In places, the flyer soars between stands of trees that are taller than skyscrapers; in others, flocks of avians trail the flyer, filling the sky with vibrant colours. As the flyer approaches the village, the clouds overhead are highlighted by the fabulous aurora of Alell, casting blood-red shadows on the ground below.

VACA GOYA

The little village of Vaca Goya is located on a hilltop, surrounded by a ring of metal poles. These poles are topped with motion-sensitive mist sprayers. The village was originally founded because of a uranium deposit nearby; the mine is largely exhausted and the primary industry is now forestry and farming. The population is under 1,000 people.

The flyer lands on the outskirts of the village, next to four other flyers. Rao directs the Travellers to take the corpse of Vlan Backett to the village hall, where a small crowd has gathered. They should present the corpse to a man named Porter Sajan, who is the local magistrate and spiritual leader.

THE HOMECOMING

When the Travellers enter the village hall, read the following:

The village hall is crowded with natives of the village, who are probably here for the free drinks, and a few visitors from the resorts or from offworld, recognisable by their environmental suits. No-one seems especially saddened by the news of Vlen Backett's death; there are no tearful mourners or wailing widows. A tall man in some sort of ceremonial robes notes your arrival and hurries over to speak with you. 'I am Porter Sajan' he announces in a doleful voice, as if apologising in advance. 'I presume you have brought the body.'

Sajan takes the Travellers aside to explain the current situation to them. Tonight is a homecoming for Backett; tomorrow will be the burial and the reading of the will. Sajan asks if the Travellers have the will with them – this is the first time the Travellers have heard any suggestion that they should have a copy of any such documentation. Sajan claims he was informed that Backett probably had a copy of the will with him when travelling offworld but that they will deal with the matter tomorrow. There may be another copy of the will elsewhere. For the moment, the Travellers should just bring the body into the hall and then remember Vlen Backett.

FAMILY GATHERING

Once the Travellers have brought the body into the hall, they can socialise with the other mourners. There are several groups present at the gathering, each of which have their own goals and memories of Vlen Backett.

PORTER SAJAN

As the village porter, Sajan is one of the most important dignitaries in Vaca Goya. He takes his responsibilities seriously and his primary goal here is to ensure that the funeral and related matters are handled smoothly and correctly.

What He Wants:

- To get this whole affair over with as quickly as possible, with the minimum of fuss.

PORTER SAJAN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	53

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	7	Admin 1, Advocate 2, Broker 0, Carouse 1, Diplomat 1, Medic 0, Persuade 1
DEX	8	EDU	8	
END	8	SOC	7	

Playing Porter Sajan:

- Speak in a dour, dull voice.
- Try to defuse any confrontation but otherwise stay quiet and uninvolved.

FAMILY TIES

If the Inheritor comes from Alell, they may already be aware of the family factions present at the funeral. In this case, the Referee should brief the Traveller on the factions before the game begins. The Travellers' sympathy may lie with one of the antagonist factions, such as the Parads or Jocells.

What He Knows:

- Sajan knows that Backett was involved in strange and possibly illegal business. He considered Backett to be a nuisance and an eccentric, the sort of person who brought troublesome offworlders to Vaca Goya.
- He hoped Backett was carrying a will with him; if no one can find a copy of the will, then the legal arguments may drag on for years.
- He suspects that the Jocells are lying about their claim on the ship but has no idea about the veracity of the Parads or the Brotherhood of Humaniti.

THE BACKETTS

Backett's closest living kin; if no will is found, they will inherit everything. The heads of the Backett family are Tomas Backett, a local merchant, and his cousin Hans Backett, a hunter and trapper. If the Inheritor has any other family connections, they are also present. Tomas never liked Vlen and is here just to see the old charlatan properly buried. Hans believes that Vlen had a fortune hidden in his old lodge and wants to make sure than no one else gets their hands on it by legal means.

What They Want:

- Tomas just wants the whole affair over with as quickly as possible and to claim the remainder of Backett's estate. However, he would settle for no money if the Jocells, Parads and the Brotherhood went away.
- Hans wants to make any existing copies of the will disappear; if there is no will, it is more likely that the Backetts will get everything.

TOMAS BACKETT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	39

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	6	Carouse 1, Persuade 1, Recon 1, Survival 0
DEX	4	EDU	5	
END	9	SOC	6	

HANS BACKETT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	37

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	5	Animals (handling) 1, Carouse 1, Gambler 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Medic 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Navigation 2, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2
DEX	9	EDU	5	
END	6	SOC	5	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Mister Rifle (2D) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+5)

Playing the Backetts:

- Base your portrayal of these characters on the personality of the Inheritor. They are family and so should have traits in common.
- Tomas sees himself as the chief mourner and will be as dignified and polite as possible.
- Hans is shifty and untrustworthy; he claims to be an experienced woodsman but gives the impression that he would abandon you in the forest if he thought you would slow him down.

What They Know:

- Vlen's relationship to the family is a curious one; no one is sure how old he is. Old Nairal Backett is nearly 80 standard years old and he remembers being introduced to 'old Great-Uncle Vlen' when he was a child. There was speculation that Vlen used anagathic drugs but where he obtained them is a mystery.
- Vlen had a lodge out in the woods where he kept souvenirs of his offworld trips and where he took visitors from offworld.

THE JOCELLS

The Jocells are another branch of the Backett family, the descendants of a cousin who left Vaca Goya to find work in the starport. They consider themselves to be cultured and cosmopolitan, and look down on their 'country bumpkin cousins', the Backetts. The leader of the Jocell delegation is Marisa Jocell, an insufferable socialite. She is accompanied by her son, Bard, who spends his days fawning over offworld nobles and tourists. Marisa wants Backett's ship to give Bard an income.

Ten years ago, Vlen arrived at the starport in his private ship, the *Star Hunter*. At the time, Marisa was a clerk in the starport control office. He secretly contacted her and confided that he was being followed, and that he needed to hide his ship. Marisa agreed to alter the starport record and hide the ship in a disused hangar and that, in return, he would leave her ownership of the vessel when he died. According to her, Vlen agreed. Six hours after the *Star Hunter* was moved, an Imperial scout ship piloted by a strange officer named Gand Holcess arrived at Alell and questioned Vlen at length.

Marisa has the only existing copy of the original documentation associated with the *Star Hunter*'s landing that day; if she does not get the deeds to the ship, she threatens to turn this evidence over to the starport authorities and have the vessel impounded.

What They Want:

- Marisa wants Vlen's ship, the *Star Hunter*. It is not at the starport and has not been seen in some years. She believes Vlen has hidden it somewhere in the jungle.
- Bard just wants to shoot rare animals in the forest. He has brought a technically illegal rifle with him from Startown, in the hopes he can get out into the wilderness and blast away at the local wildlife.

What They Know:

- Vlen travelled offworld regularly and preferred to avoid the eyes of the Imperium.
- At one point, six years ago, a scout named Gand Holcess was very interested in talking to Vlen.
- Gand Holcess is back on Alell and unless they get the *Star Hunter*, they will let him know about Vlen Backett's mysterious death. Everyone involved may be arrested and questioned by the Imperium!

MARISA JOCELL

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		40
TRAITS			—	**SKILLS**
STR	6	**INT**	7	Admin 2, Astrogation 0, Deception 0, Electronics (comms) 2, Electronics (computers) 1, Electronics (sensors) 1, Flyer 0, Streetwise 0
DEX	6	**EDU**	8	
END	8	**SOC**	8	

BARD JOCELL

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		22
TRAITS			—	**SKILLS**
STR	7	**INT**	4	Carouse 2, Deception 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Navigation 0, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1
DEX	7	**EDU**	6	
END	8	**SOC**	8	
EQUIPMENT		**Weapons:** Hunting Rifle (3D) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+5)		

Playing The Jocells:

- Marisa is overblown and self-important, and is very used to getting her way. She preens and dresses like she was a minor noble and has ambitions far above her station.
- Her son Bard is thoroughly useless, interested only in hanging around with his wealthy offworlder friends and hunting.
- Both of the Jocells are overawed by anyone with higher Social Standing than them and look down on anyone lower.

THE PARADS

The Parads are another family from Alell, unrelated to the Backetts. Ten years ago, Backett borrowed more than MCr1 from Yusul Parad and kept promising that this debt would be honoured. Now, Backett is dead and Yusal wants his money. Yusal is accompanied by two thugs.

The Parads are criminals with a fearsome reputation on Alell. Anyone who crosses them usually ends up dead; as usual, Vlen has done things in the wrong order.

YASUL PARAD

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	46

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	10	Admin 2, Advocate 2, Broker 1, Deception 1, Diplomat 0, Gun Combat 0, Persuade 3, Streetwise 2
DEX	6	EDU	10	
END	7	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT				**Armour:** Concealed Armoured Vest (+5)

Playing Yusal Parad:

- You consider yourself to be a very big fish. Anyone who does not give you due respect must be punished.
- You are restraining yourself out of respect for the funeral ceremony; normally, the thought of holding out on you would cause paroxysms of rage.
- Do not get your own hands dirty; you have hired goons for that.

MORGAN THE BODYGUARD

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	37

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	6	Carouse 0, Deception 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	10	SOC	4	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Snub Pistol (3D-3) **Armour:** Concealed Armoured Vest (+5)

What He Wants:

- Money. A million Credits, plus interest. His agreement with Vlen was a verbal contract but Parad believes no-one in the village will dare cross him.

What He Knows:

- Vlen had connections to the interstellar criminal community. He worked with Ven Yasha, the infamous Reginan smuggler.
- Vlen was involved in smuggling Ancients artefacts. Those fetch a high price on the black market – if Vlen happened to have an Ancients relic or two, then those might serve as partial payment of Vlen's debt.

THE LOCALS

The villagers of Vaca Goya are here for the free drink but are a useful source of rumours and gossip about Vlen.

What They Know:

- Vlen was an odd bird and you could never really trust him. He told the most marvellous stories about other worlds, however.
- He delighted in tricks and games. It would be just like Vlen to put a riddle or a puzzle into his will or to hide the will itself somewhere in plain sight.
- Vlen definitely made a will. Either one of the Backetts destroyed it or Vlen hid it somewhere.
- Porter Sajan knew Vlen quite well, and knows how tangled Vlen's affairs could get. He probably wants to keep everything simple and would be willing to overlook some irregularities if it got the whole matter sorted more quickly.
- The Parads are criminals. Stay away from them, they are dangerous!

LATER ARRIVALS

The other two factions at the funeral, the Brotherhood of Humaniti and Arisa, arrive after the Travellers. Another flyer lands outside the village around an hour after the Travellers and the monks disembark. Arisa arrives in a third flyer soon after that.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF HUMANITI

The Brotherhood is an order of monks. A delegation of four monks arrives, all dressed identically in green robes with shaved heads. The leader of these monks introduces herself as Aail. When she speaks, the other three monks chant a mantra as accompaniment. Aail explains that 'Initiate Zuu', known to the secular world as Vlen Backett, was a member of their order some years ago. He fled the monastery in the dead of night and never returned – but as part of his initiation, he signed over all worldly goods to the Brotherhood of Humanity. It has taken the Brotherhood some time to find Zuu's homeworld but they are here now to claim what is rightfully theirs.

What They Want:

- Everything Vlen Backett owned.

What They Know:

- Backett somehow found their secret monastery on Victoria in the Lanth subsector and applied for membership of the Brotherhood. They have a copy of Vlen's oath of membership, which does indeed bear Backett's signature and identity imprint.
- He left the order after two weeks. Around the same time, their cherished relic, the Sceptre of Ur, also vanished. They have no proof that Vlen stole the sceptre but if he did then it may still be among his belongings.

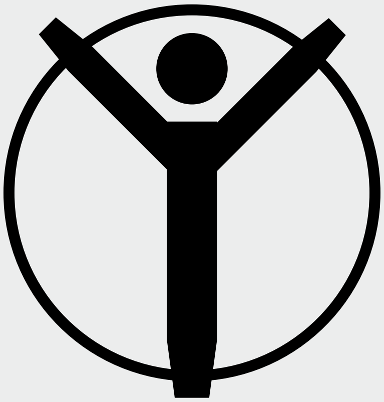
BROTHERHOOD MEMBER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	5	Art (performer) 1, Medic 0, Persuade 0, Science (genetics) 1, Steward 1
DEX	6	EDU	7	
END	6	SOC	6	

Playing Members of the Brotherhood of Humaniti:

- The Brotherhood are an esoteric religious group who believe that all Humaniti must unite into one. They love and cherish each and every human in a distinctly uncomfortable way. Treat every human like you want nothing more than to keep them safe *forever*, like a collection of butterflies.
- Non-humans are dangerous monsters who must be destroyed. Anyone who opposes the Brotherhood's deranged scheme of racial unity is probably a secret servant of non-humans.
- Never stop smiling. You have found the shining bliss of the ur-human (or are deeply disturbed, depending on the observer).



Brotherhood of Humaniti

ARISA

Just as the homecoming is winding down and the villagers are beginning to depart, another flyer arrives. This is piloted by a woman in a black jumpsuit, with laughing eyes and the close-cropped hair of a spacer. She introduces herself as Arisa – Arisa *Backett.* Vlen, she says, was her husband.

In fact, Arisa is a scout and an agent of Gand Holcess. His ship, the *Alahir*, is in orbit over Vaca Goya. Arisa will report any suspicious activity to Captain Holcess during the night.

What She Knows:

- Secretly, Arisa knows that Vlen Backett was under observation by Imperial Intelligence and that he is suspected of involvement in a mysterious conspiracy.
- Her cover story is that she comes from Rech in the Lanth subsector, an agricultural backwater rimward of Regina. Backett met her at the starport bar and married her after a whirlwind romance; he had to go away on business to Regina with a Mr. Yosha but promised her he would soon return and bring her home to Alell.

What She Wants:

- Information about Vlen; ideally, proof that he was involved in the mysterious conspiracy that Holcess suspects threatens the Imperium.

Arisa's Proof:

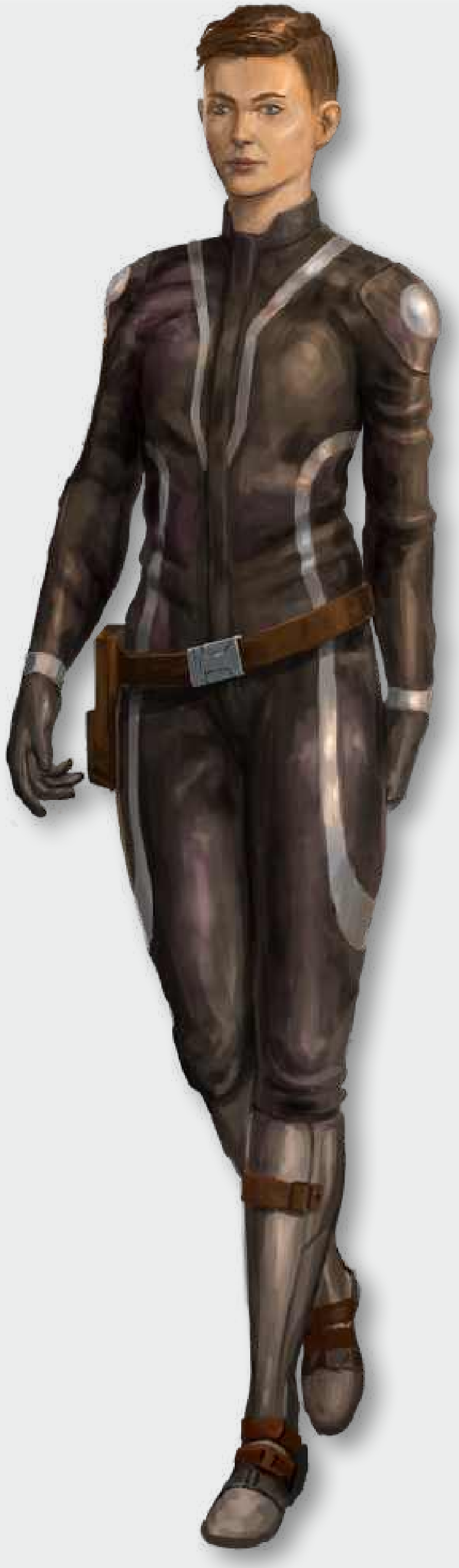
- Suspicious Travellers may ask for proof and Arisa has a 'genuine' marriage certificate from Regina. The certificate is real, even if she never married Vlen – Gand Holcess used his connections in the government to obtain the certificate.

ARISA

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE	
Human		Female		34	
TRAITS			—	**SKILLS**	
STR	7	**INT**	9	Admin 0, Advocate 1, Astrogation 1, Athletics (dexterity) 2, Carouse 1, Deception 2, Diplomat 1, Electronics (comms) 0, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Gunner (turret) 1, Investigate 2, Mechanic 1, Medic 0, Navigation 2, Persuade 0, Pilot (starship) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Vacc Suit 1	
DEX	9	**EDU**	11		
END	7	**SOC**	8		
EQUIPMENT		**Weapons:** Body Pistol (3D-3) **Armour:** Concealed Tailored Vacc Suit (+8)			

Playing Arisa:

- Her presence here is deliberately provocative; she has no evidence that Vlen was married but decided this was the best way to draw out any contacts or allies of Vlen's.
- She is a highly competent spy, who enjoys the challenging nature of her work. She hates boredom; better to be running from Zhodani border guards and dodging laser blasts than to be trapped behind a desk in some dull office.
- Her cover identity is as a flighty air-head, the sort who would be incredibly impressed by a battered scout ship and the romance of a Traveller.
- Never hesitate, always act. Doing something is always better than doing nothing.
- Smile and touch people when talking to them. Arisa uses touch to secretly probe for hidden weapons or concealed electronics.



EVENTS AT THE HOMECOMING

This section of the adventure should be run in a freeform manner. Split the Travellers up and let them mingle at the funeral. If the game drags, use any of the events below to get things moving again.

Hans Tries Bribery: Believing that the Travellers have the will, Hans Backett approaches whichever Traveller seems the most underhanded and makes an offer. Hans has a cargo of five tons of rare furs and other animal products, worth Cr10000 a ton at least (sale DM+4 at Rich or High Population worlds). He will trade that for the will. If the Traveller refuses, or says they do not have the will, then Hans assumes the Traveller is lying and has something to gain from the will coming to light. He then hints darkly that the jungles of Alell are dangerous for offworlders.

Shouting Match: An argument breaks out between one drunken local and Yusal Parad. The local accuses Parad of being a criminal and a murderer, and shouts that no one in Vaca Goya wants Parad's sort around here. Parad impassively ignores the local and has his goons 'encourage' the drunk to leave the village hall. After that, the crowd subtly draws away from Parad, creating an empty, silent exclusion zone around him.

The Brotherhood and Porter Sajan: The Brotherhood of Humaniti approach Porter Sajan to discuss tomorrow's funeral arrangements. Aail wants Backett buried in accordance with the Brotherhood's teachings, where a sample of his DNA is taken for interment in the monastery archive, so in future millennia all believers will be part of the Ur-Humaniti to come. The ceremony she proposes is six hours long and involves denouncing 'all races, persons, governments, creeds, groups, species or thoughts that deny the essential unity of all Humaniti'. Porter Sajan is understandably nonplussed by this request and looks to the Travellers to help him deal with the cultists.

Arisa makes a scene: Arisa wants to provoke a reaction from the other mourners at the funeral. She goes around tearfully embracing her 'relatives', claiming that Vlen told her all about them. She tries to get the Backetts and the Travellers talking, and may even attempt to draw Travellers into compromising situations ('*will no-one comfort the young, emotionally vulnerable widow?'.*)

The gunshot: During the night, after most of the mourners have departed, a shot from a hunting rifle rings out over the village, narrowly missing the Travellers. The shooter vanishes into the night. The Travellers may suspect Parad or Hans Backett but it was actually Bard Jocell, who mistook the Inheritor for Tomas Backett.

DEALING WITH THE FACTIONS

If the Travellers can eliminate the conflicting claims of the other parties, they will make life much simpler for themselves. The Jocells' claim on the *Star Hunter* can be thwarted by pointing out that Marisa is actually the one who committed a crime by abusing her position in the starport to hide the ship all those years ago. If the Travellers point this out, Marisa blusters and threatens them with informing Gand Holcess but it is clear that she really has nothing to stand on.

Dealing with the Parads is more dangerous; their strength is their reputation as hardened criminals. If the Travellers are willing to face down the thugs, they can force the Parads out. Yusal will threaten the Travellers with the wrath of organised crime on Alell but that will soon be the least of the Travellers' problems.

The Brotherhood of Humaniti has a genuine claim but a Traveller who succeeds at a Very Difficult (12+) Advocate check (1D hours, EDU) can find precedent under Imperial law that such a document is illegal. The Brotherhood may have some rights to Backett's estate but certainly not everything they want.

Arisa's marriage certificate is a forgery but indistinguishable from the real thing. Under Alell law, unless a will is found, she will inherit the bulk of Vlen's estate.

FAKE WILLS

Creative or unscrupulous Travellers may try faking the will, seeing as no real copy has come to light. Creating a forgery requires a Very Difficult (12+) Advocate or Deception check (1D hours, INT). The forgery will not hold up to detailed analysis.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

The next morning, everyone gathers for Vlen Backett's funeral. Despite the protests of the Brotherhood of Humaniti, he is buried in accordance with the local traditions of Alell. The body is taken from the village hall to a green field within the mister precincts, where it is buried in an unmarked grave. The original settlers of Alell used the remains of their dead to cultivate 'safe' crops, when they did not know which plants in the jungle were edible. The tradition remains to this day – Backett's corpse will be allowed to slowly decay and feed the village green (at least, it would if an Ancients ship were not already on its way to pick up his mind-state and reincarnate him).

At the ceremony, Sajan gives a brief eulogy of Vlen Backett and encourages anyone else who wishes to speak to do so. Unless the Travellers do so, no-one responds to his appeal.

What can be said of Vlen Backett? He was a mystery to his dying day. Everyone standing here knew him but we saw only one small part of him. None of us knew the whole and I do not think anyone ever did. Vlen went beyond the confines of our little world. He travelled further than anyone I have ever known and saw things we cannot imagine. He had friends and comrades on 100 worlds and propped up the bar in 1,000 starports. He was not always a good man, or a wise man, but he was always... surprising.

Vlen was a stranger in strange stars and he brought a little of that strangeness back to enrich our lives.

Goodbye, Vlen. Life here in Vaca Goya will be much duller without you.

THE QUESTION OF THE WILL

After the funeral, Sajan gathers the Backetts, Arisa and any of the other claimants together with the Travellers and meets with them all in his house. He explains that no valid copy of Backett's will has been found but believes there may be a copy in existence. He has searched Backett's house in the village to no avail; can anyone suggest another place it might be?

If the Travellers do not suggest Backett's jungle lodge, then Tomas mentions it as a possibility. Sajan requests that the Travellers travel to the lodge and search it for the will. The exact location of the lodge is not on record, so the Travellers will have to hack through the jungle and search the area. The lodge is likely to be covered in vines at this point and may not be visible from the air.

Hans Backett immediately volunteers to go as a guide and Arisa wishes to accompany the expedition too. If still present, then Yusal Parad says that he will send one of his bodyguards and Bard Jocell claims to be an expert woodsman and demands to be included. The Travellers can accept any of these if they wish.

OUTFITTING

Machetes and mister guns can be purchased in the village store, as can jack, mesh jacket, and flak jacket armour.

GETTING THERE

While there are several flyers parked in Vaca Goya, only Rao knows roughly where the lodge is. If the Travellers try flying, they must make a Difficult (10+) Navigation check (INT) to find the lodge. Success grants DM+4 to rolls on the Wilderness Encounters table.

Alternatively, the Travellers can just march out through the mister fields and head roughly in the direction of the lodge.

INTO THE JUNGLE

Read the following to the Travellers:

Less than half a kilometre outside Vaca Goya, you could have stepped a million years back in time. The jungles of Alell are still primal wilderness and there is not a single trace of humanity here. You are surrounded on all sides by walls of golden-barked trees with blood-red leaves. You hack your way through the underbrush, cutting aside web-like ferns and vines like braided ropes. Insects – or the local analogues of insect life, ugly four-legged things with eyes on their hips – scurry away from you or crawl over your legs.

You would have thought finding Vlen's lodge would be easy but it quickly becomes apparent how swiftly the plants grow. Leave a vehicle out here overnight and you will return to find it dusted in spores; leave it for a week and it will be choked in vines. Leave it over a year and it will be indistinguishable from the forest floor. Any of these little plant-covered hillocks could be Vlen's lodge.

WILDERNESS ENCOUNTERS

Roll on the Wilderness Encounter table below for every hour of travel, adding the highest Survival and Navigation scores among the Travellers as DMs. If no-one has at least Survival 0 or Navigation 0, apply DM-2. Add DM+1 for every previous roll on the table, representing the Travellers' progress along the trail.

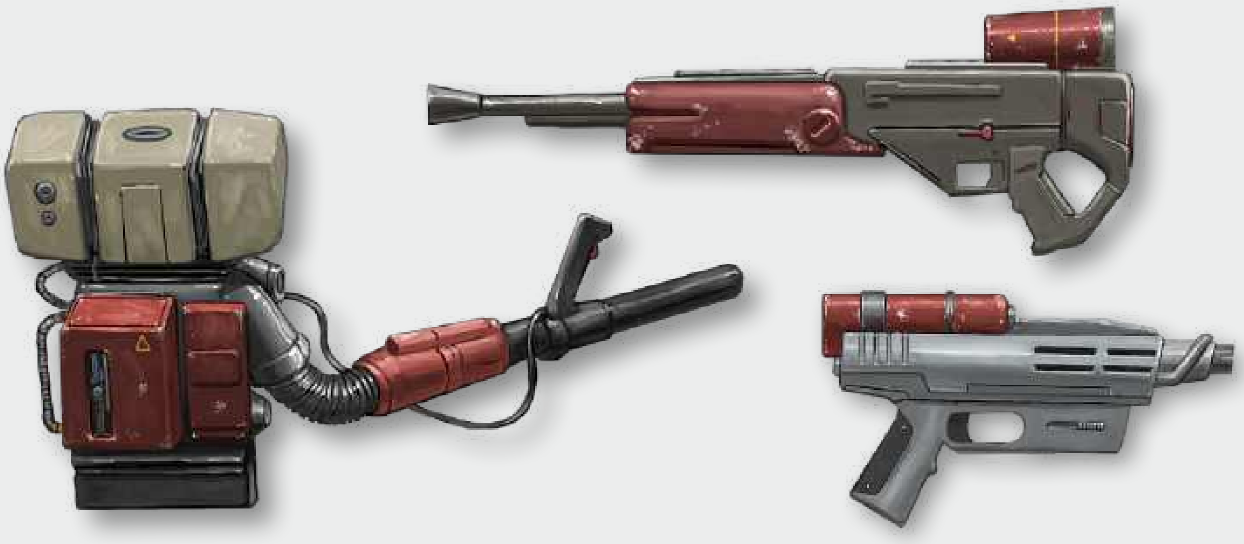
Wilderness Encounters

Roll	Encounter
0–4	Minor Obstacle
5–6	Animal Encounter
7–8	Minor Obstacle
9–10	Animal Encounter
11–12	Major Obstacle
13+	Discovery

Minor Obstacle: The Travellers encounter a minor obstacle or hazard, such as a treacherous bog, torrential downpour, extremely thick vegetation or steep incline. No check is needed to navigate this obstacle but getting through it saps D3 END.

Major Obstacle: The Travellers run into a dangerous obstacle. Roll 1D to determine what sort of danger they encounter.

1. **Steep Cliff.** A 20-metre-tall shelf of shifted rock that runs as far as the Travellers can see. The only way forward is up. This requires a Difficult (10+) DEX check (1D minutes) to climb. Failing with an Effect of -4 or less means the Traveller falls from the cliff and suffers 3D damage.
2. **Quicksand.** One Traveller, chosen at random, blunders into a patch of quicksand. The Traveller must make a series of Average (8+) DEX checks to climb out. Keep track of the Traveller's cumulative Effect. Effect 5+ or more is needed to escape; if the cumulative Effect reaches -5, the Travellers slips under the surface and begins to drown. Apply DM-1 to each subsequent check after the first to represent the Traveller slowly sinking.
3. **Poisonous Plants.** One Traveller chosen at random brushes past a dangerous plant and is stung. The Traveller must make an Average (8+) END check or suffer 1D damage to both STR and DEX.
4. **Stinging Insects.** A swarm of hungry flesh-eating insects emerge from a dead tree stump. Terran-descended creatures taste incredibly delicious to these insects. The swarm has 50 hits; Travellers can either try to destroy the swarm with mister attacks and other area-effect weapons, or else flee. A Traveller caught in the swarm takes 1D damage per round, unless they are wearing sealed armour.
5. **Mudslide.** A tide of loose earth and watery mud slips downhill and threatens to engulf the characters. All Travellers must make a Difficult (10+) STR check to stay standing. Those who fail are knocked prone and take 2D damage; those who fail with Effect -3 or less are swept away in the flood and become separated from the other Travellers.
6. **Extreme Rains.** A tropical storm breaks over the Travellers; they must either wait for the storm to pass (taking 2D hours) or else continue on but lose any accumulated DMs to their Wilderness Encounter rolls.



WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	MAGAZINE COST	TRAITS
Mister Pistol	9	20m	1D	1.5	Cr75	20	Cr10	—
Mister Rifle	9	30m	2D	6	Cr150	20	Cr20	—
Heavy Mister	9	30m	3D	10	Cr300	20	Cr30	—

Sealed armour (such as vacc Suits and battle dress) provide complete immunity to mister attacks. Unsealed armour provides no defence. Native creatures of Alell that are struck by a mister attack will flee on a 2D roll of 8+.

Animal Encounter: The Travellers encounter a dangerous animal. Roll on the Animal Encounters table to determine which creature they encounter.

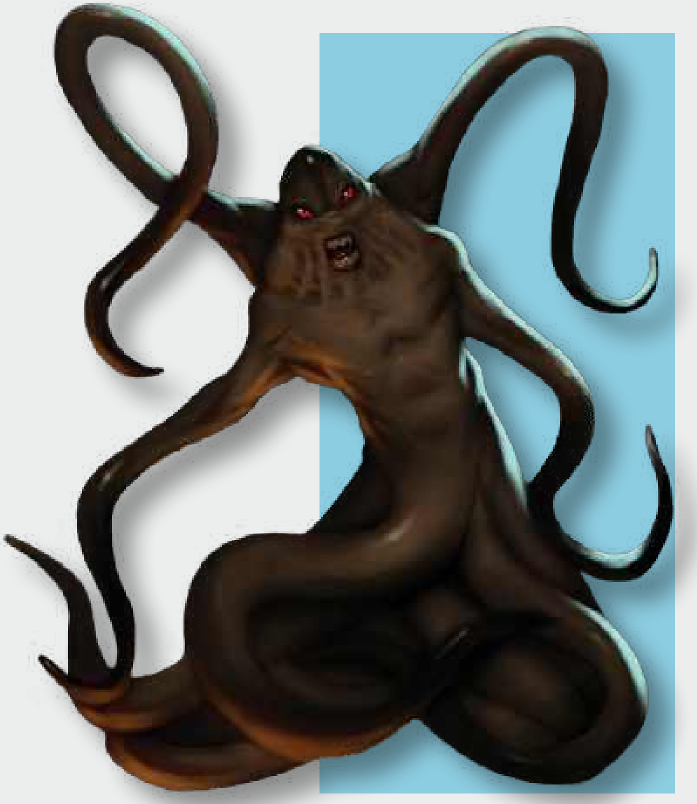
Animal Encounters

2D	Animal
2-3	Cadgeree
4-7	Lambdragon
8-11	Whisperhawk
12	Maleficent

Maleficent

Infamous and mysterious predators of the Alell jungles, maleficents are fast and brutal creatures. They are jet-black in colour, although markings can be seen under ultraviolet light. They travel through the trees by means of tentacles, snaking along the canopy in search of prey. Little is known about their biology but some scientists believe they are not originally native to Alell.

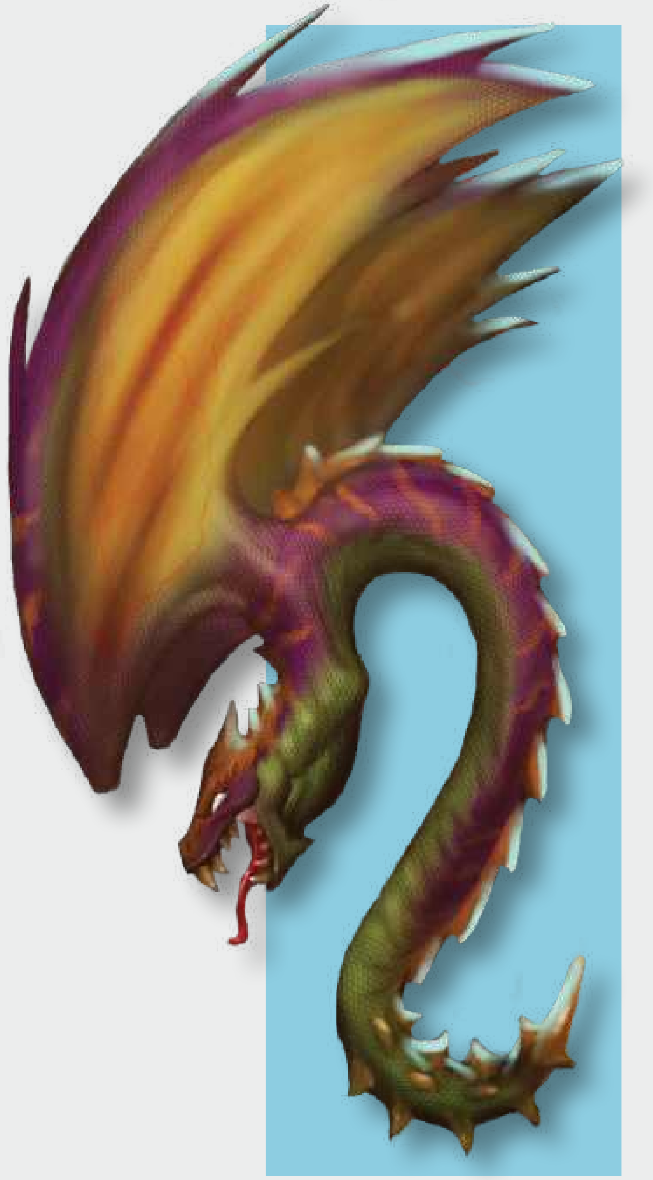
Animal	Hits	Speed
Maleficent	42	6m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 3, Survival 1	
Attacks	Teeth (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+1), Large (+2)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Hunter	



Cadgeree

The cadgeree resembles a winged snake with a spiked tail. Cadgeree are extremely effective predators, who attack by hurling themselves down on prey from a great height, embedding their tail spikes deep into the target's flesh. The serpent then thrashes wildly, snapping the spine of its victim with ease. Cadgeree usually attack smaller creatures but have been known to attack humans when hungry.

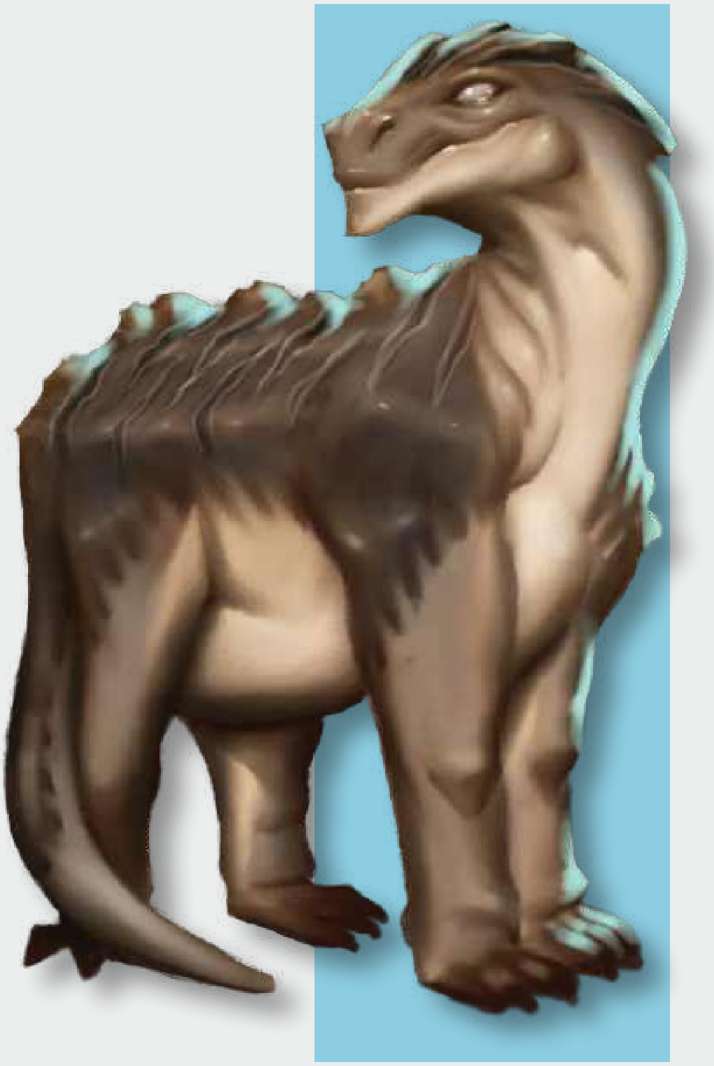
Animal	Hits	Speed
Cadgeree	17	6m
Skills	Melee (natural) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1	
Attacks	Spiked Tail (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+1), Flyer (very slow)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Pouncer	



Lambdragon

Large herbivores common to the Alell jungles. Lambdragons slowly graze through the forest, eating from the treetops. They have few natural predators, due to their size and the protection of the pack. The term 'lambdragon' was given to them because of their perceived gentleness but attacks by lambdragons are not impossible. The creatures have surprisingly sharp teeth for a herbivore (more accurately, they have two sets of teeth – an exterior set of flat teeth for feeding on leaves and a retractable set of sharper teeth used in defence and mating rituals) and a stampede of lambdragons can flatten a tank.

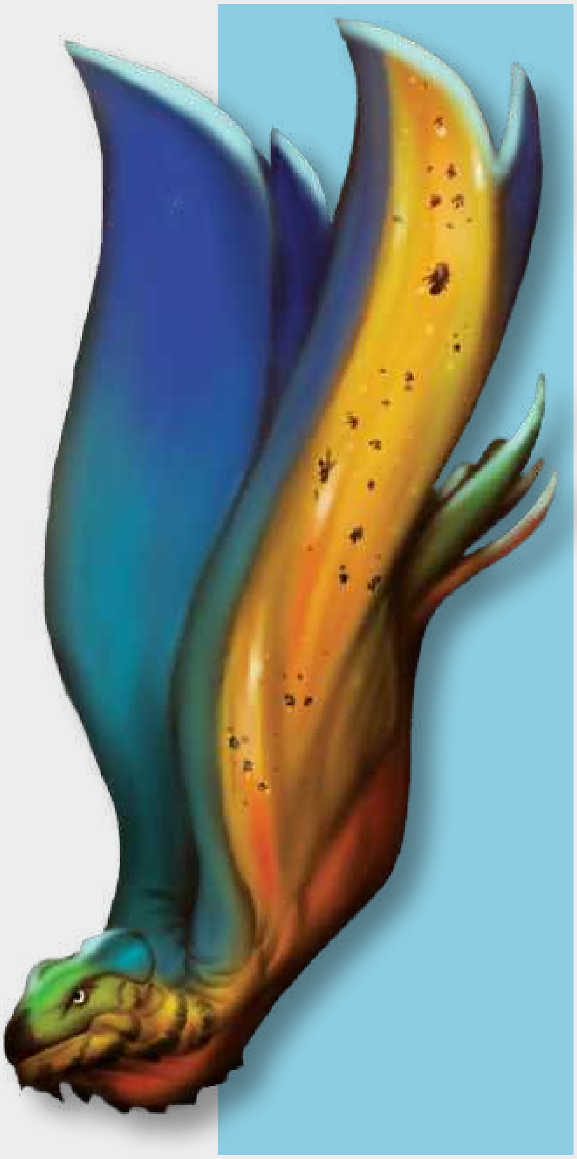
Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
Lambdragon	92	7m
Skills	Melee 0, Recon 2, Survival 3	
Attacks	Stampede (6D)	
Traits	Armour (+2), Large (+5)	
Behaviour	Herbivore, Grazer	



Whisperhawk

One of the most common sights in the jungle, whisperhawks are beautiful avians with prodigious wingspans. The hawk's wings are both locomotion and feeding organs – whisperhawks feed by digesting the insects that are caught on the sticky underside of the wings. A flock of hawks can glide across the jungle canopy at twilight, catching hundreds of thousands of insects as they fly. The buzzing of the trapped insects and the susurrus of the wind gives the whisperhawk its name.

Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
Whisperhawk	26	2m
Skills	Melee 0, Stealth 2	
Attacks	Suffocate (1D)	
Traits	Flyer (slow), Large (+1)	
Behaviour	Herbivore, Filter	



Discovery: The Travellers come across a sign that they are on the right path. There are three discoveries, which are encountered in the following order:

1. **The Landing Strip:** The Travellers find a flat area of ground. It is heavily overgrown but it is clear that a flyer could be landed here if necessary and that a few hours work with cutting tools would turn the area into a workable landing site. There is an old path leading towards a nearby hill. As the Travellers walk along the path, they find a sealed hatch in the ground. This hatch cannot be opened by any tool the Travellers possess – it is part of the defence system of the lodge.
2. **The Body:** In the hollow of a tree, nearly hidden by a curtain of vines and moss, a Traveller glimpses white bone. There is the skeleton of a human, dressed in the tattered remains of an Alellian encounter suit. There are several bullet holes in the chest of the suit but no sign of any identification or equipment. The body is at least a decade old. The Travellers will never discover who this was but it is a hint that Vlen Backett was not a saint.
3. **The Lodge:** The Travellers finally discover the lodge.

THE LODGE

Read the following out loud:

It takes you a second to recognise this place as a building. The jungle has almost reclaimed Vlen's old lodge and creepers cover almost every inch of the walls. The roof bows under the weight of moss and vines but the place still seems structurally sound. After cutting away vegetation over the door, you find the interior is quite intact and environmental seals have kept the plants and moisture at bay.

The main room of the lodge is crammed with all manner of junk. Papers, books, data terminals and scribbled notes cover piles of curios from offworld. In one corner, a packing crate has spilled its contents of shiny nuggets of some exotic ore all over the floor; in another, there is a framed painting that must have been made by a species with greater colour sensitivity than humans. Hanging over the fireplace is a collection of weapons that are probably grotesquely illegal.

Arisa sighs and sits down. 'Vlen told me about this place. I dreamed of it...' She starts flicking through documents, her eyes glimmering with tears.

Once the Travellers start searching through the contents of the lodge, they find the following clues.

TWO-LEGGED PREDATORS

If the Travellers are accompanied by other characters, then there is added danger.

Hans Backett: Hans is an excellent woodsman but wants to eliminate anyone who might have a copy of Vlen's will. If possible, he will try to convince the Travellers to turn back and give the lodge up for lost; if they keep going, he will take advantage of any environmental dangers to eliminate rivals.

Bard Jocell: Bard is an idiot who believes himself to be an excellent tracker. He will boast to the Travellers about his experience in survival and hunting and try to get them to use his Survival and Navigation skills instead of theirs. He will also pursue any wild beasts the group encounters.

Parad's Thug: Morgan, the 'bodyguard', is actually the most trustworthy of the potential expedition members. He is quiet, professional and uncomplaining. Of course, he will threaten to shoot anyone who suggests giving up and returning to Vaca Goya. Having both Hans and Morgan in the party is a recipe for a firefight.

Arisa: Arisa pretends to be a clueless farmgirl but she does have some survival training and will put these skills to work if she thinks the group is in danger. She will encourage the Travellers to get to the lodge as quickly as possible. She is carrying a location beacon, transmitting her location to a squad of Imperial Marines who are her backup. The marines are tracking the Travellers from the skies; their battle dress has built-in grav belts, so the marines are holding position above the clouds, waiting for the signal.

THE COMPUTER

Vlen's computer system is a surprisingly advanced one (TL14), imported from offworld. A Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check (1D minutes, INT) lets a Traveller access the system; a Formidable (14+) check is required to get access to the encrypted files.

The easily accessible files are Vlen's notes from his travels. He has obviously travelled all over the Spinward Marches and beyond. It is not easy to determine exactly what Vlen was doing on his voyages; while there are a few references to trade, the cost of the trips greatly exceeds any profit from speculative trade. Despite that, Vlen seems to have had access to virtually unlimited funds. On some worlds, he visited scientific institutions or met with political and corporate leaders; on others, he just wandered the countryside, visited museums, prospected in the asteroid belt or did not record his activities.

If the Travellers manage to access the encrypted files, they hear an unimaginable complicated hubbub of recorded voices, as vast amounts of data scroll across the screen. The computer has a copy of the intercepted data from Regina (Ven Yosha's hidden space station in Regina intercepted and decrypted even 'secure' Imperial transmissions). This is a treasure trove of information.

There is a similar, smaller interception device monitoring transmissions at Alell starport. As soon as the Travellers start looking at the secure files, it flashes up a series of intercepted messages between a vessel in orbit and the starport authorities – give the Travellers Handout 4.

ANCIENTS RESEARCH

One wall contains books and notes on the Ancients, gathered from 100 worlds. There is everything from scholarly dissertations and ponderous tomes on archaeology to secret military reports and lunatic fringe rantings. Professor Ujinka's previous works on the Ancients have pride of place. One file is a list of Ancients artefacts held in museums and research institutions across the Imperium and beyond – and Vlen has notes on each one of them, including whether or not the artefact is genuine. How Backett knew this is unclear.

The Sceptre: Wrapped in a tattered blanket is the Sceptre of Ur, the relic stolen from the Brotherhood of Humaniti. This relic is a half-metre long object made of a greenish stone that is strangely warm to the touch. It is engraved with strange markings reminiscent of Droyne glyphs.

The Statue: One holophoto depicts a strange, semi-abstract statue that resembles a winged pillar. If the Travellers recovered the statue from Ven Yasha's station on Regina, they recognise it as the same piece. According to the metadata on the holophoto, the picture was taken at an auction house on Rhylanor.

The Data Tapes: Attached to the photo are a set of data tapes, describing how the statue was discovered in the Boughene system. See page 38.

WEAPONS

The weapons above the fireplace are decorative but opening a closet reveals an arsenal of heavy weapons. Backett has a pair of gauss pistols, a plasma rifle, an ACR with underslung RAM grenade launcher... and an FGMP (TL15). Even the pistols are illegal on Alell, while that FGMP is illegal anywhere in the Imperium. There is also an aerosol injector with four doses of combat drug and a TL12 vacc suit.

IDENTITY CARDS

One folder contains Vlen's identity papers, certificates and other documentation – as well as the documentation for a dozen other identities. All the photographs are of Vlen but according to these documents, he is also a spice miner on Keanu, a bartender on Rhylanor, a diplomat, a mechanic, a minor noble... and he is also Ven Yasha of Regina. The dates on the identity papers range between 20 and *600*.

THE WILL

Under a pile of old *Journals of the Traveller's Aid Society,* the Travellers find a copy of Vlen's will. It leaves everything to the Backett family. His spaceship goes to 'any of his kin who are willing to fly the damn thing'. The one curious thing about the will is that it specifies Backett's burial conditions – he must be interred 'as whole as possible, preferably in a non-metallic coffin, no more than two metres below the surface'.

THE TRAPDOOR

In the bathroom of the lodge is a trapdoor in the floor. This trapdoor leads to a narrow set of stairs, which goes down to the cavern below...

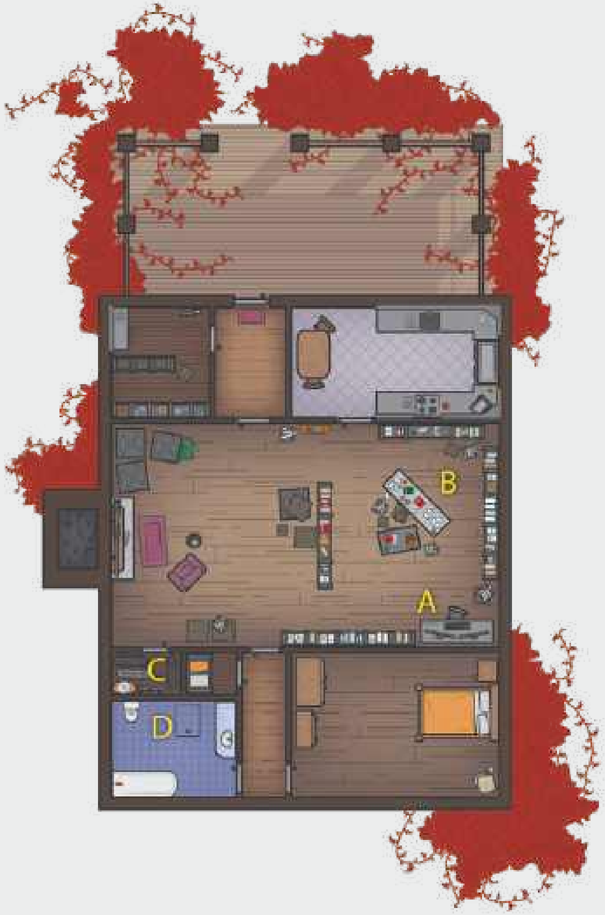
BENEATH THE LODGE

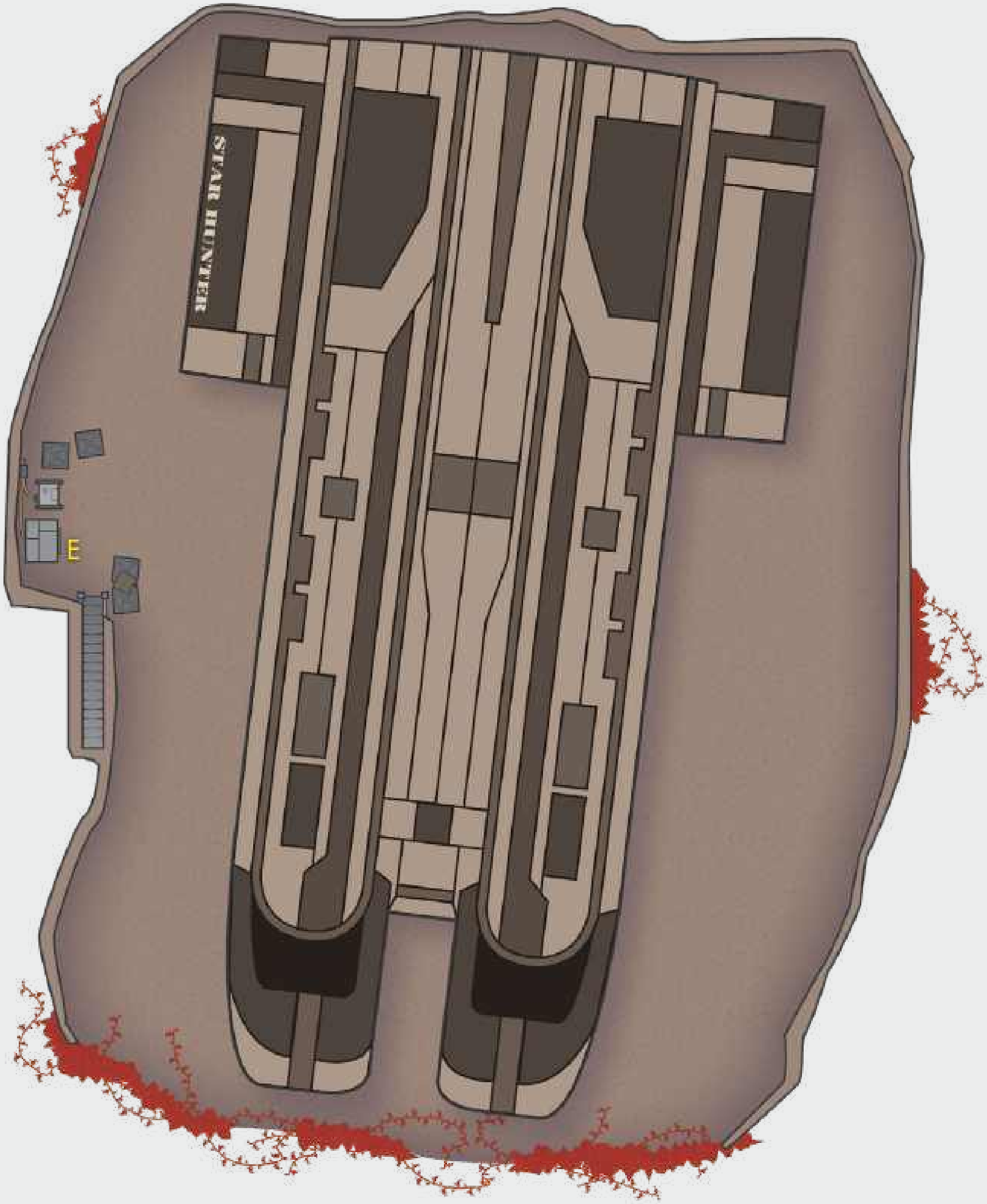
When the Travellers enter the cavern, read the following:

As you reach the bottom of the staircase, which was apparently cut out of the bare rock with a laser, harsh electric lights come on automatically. You are standing at the edge of a cavern that has been outfitted as a ship's hangar. A battered but apparently functional starship stands before you. The name 'Star Hunter' is emblazoned on the rear engine cowling.

This is Vlen Backett's personal ship, a heavily modified Empress Marava Class Far Trader. The *Star Hunter* is fully fuelled and ready to fly. Better yet, the ship's security systems are disabled, so the Travellers can just fly it out of the cave and into orbit.

THE LODGE




STAR HUNTER
E

A. Computer
B. Ancients Research
C. Weapons Closet
D. Trapdoor
E. Weapons Systems

1m

Details for the *Star Hunter* are on page 58.

The cave mouth is concealed by hanging vines and roots, making it practically invisible from orbit. The Travellers can easily clear the obstacles away or just fly straight through them.

WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Also in the cave is a computer terminal attached to a large grey metal structure. A quick examination reveals that it is the control system for a defensive network, similar to the one surrounding Professor Ujinka's house on Regina. Whatever this system is controlling, however, has a lot more firepower than Ujinka's drones.

The weapon system is currently monitoring half-a-dozen small targets that are holding station 2,000 metres above the lodge.

RAPIER STRIKE

At a suitably dramatic moment (either when the will is found or when the Travellers uncover the *Star Hunter*), Arisa secretly signals for her backup to arrive.

'ATTENTION! SURRENDER IN THE NAME OF THE EMPEROR!' booms an electronically-boosted voice from outside. An armoured figure drops down out of the sky – an Imperial Marine, in full battle dress and carrying a huge plasma weapon. Another two marines hover nearby, like angry angels.

The marine strides towards the house, the ground shaking with each step they take. You spot more marines swooping low over the house to land on the far side. There are at least six marines out there. You're surrounded.

REACTIONS

If any of the characters from Vaca Goya accompanied the Travellers, their reactions are as follows.

Hans Backett: Hans panics when he sees the marines land and assumes (correctly) that old uncle Vlen must have been a criminal or a terrorist or a spy or something. He flees into the cavern under the lodge and out through the cave mouth, where he is grabbed and arrested by a marine.

Bard Jocell: Jocell is confused by the whole matter. He has no idea who the marines are or just how outmatched they all are. He wanders out to berate them about intimidating Imperial citizens.

Morgan: The criminal leaps to the conclusion that this trap is meant for him and believes the Travellers are undercover agents sent to lure him. He attempts to take the weakest or highest SOC Traveller hostage.

Arisa: Arisa hangs back, hoping the Travellers will surrender. If they show signs of trying to flee, she drops the false farmgirl persona and reveals herself as an Imperial Intelligence agent. She pulls out her hidden pistol and attempts to force the Travellers to surrender.

NEGOTIATIONS

If the Travellers try talking their way out, they are patched through to Captain Gand Holcess of the *Alahir*.

'*Surrender, or face the consequences. I have an Imperial Writ giving me the right to restrain and question you. Failure to comply is an act of treason. Vlen Backett may have gotten away but I'm damned if I'm going to let you wriggle out of my grasp.'*

The Travellers can question or plead with Holcess at this point, as the marines close in. Likely questions are as follows.

What the hell is going on?: *Vlen Backett was suspected of sedition and conspiracy against the Imperial government. You are potential accessories to his crimes. Surrender!*

We surrender!: *Remain where you are. Place all weapons on the floor in front of you and make no threatening moves.*

We Don't Know Anything About Vlen Backett!: *That has yet to be determined to my satisfaction.*

IT ALL GOES WRONG

Some Travellers may skip right to stealing the *Star Hunter* and trying to escape at this point, or turning the ship's turret guns on the marines. Others may grab the FGMP and start blasting away.

Even if the Travellers *want* to surrender, they are not going to get that option. Backett installed a defence system to deal with unwanted attention from either the Imperium or agents of rival Ancients and it is powerful enough to obliterate even a marine in battle dress. When the firefight starts, read the following:

There is a subsonic thud *that runs through your spine as a projectile is launched from somewhere under the lodge. A bright projectile soars into the sky, then arcs around and heads straight for one of the hovering marines. He tries to dodge the incoming missile but it is too fast. The sun is momentarily outshone by a harsh white light and shards of hot metal rain down from above.* Thud, thud, thud. *More missiles launch. The marines scatter, their weapons spitting plasma fire into the air.*

One globule of sun-hot plasma scorches past the lodge, blowing a hole in the roof and far wall. There are more explosions outside as the area turns into a war zone.

There are five surviving marines. Each round, roll 1D; if it less than the current number of marines, one marine is obliterated by Backett's defences. The walls of the lodge provide Protection +8 against attacks, while the natural rock of the cavern Provides Protection +15. Travellers who stand and fight the marines are likely to be incinerated in short order.

The marines are now uninterested in taking prisoners. From their perspective, the Travellers suddenly attacked them with unknown weapons. Protecting themselves is their first priority and if they must do that by levelling the lodge and the surrounding countryside, so be it. Encourage overly brave Travellers to flee through the trapdoor into the cavern below.

If the Travellers fall back to the cavern, they can use the *Star Hunter's* weapons on the marines.

THIS PILE OF CARBON USED TO BE ME

Travellers who get incinerated in this fight will have to generate a new Traveller. Alternatively, if they wish, they can take over Morgan, Bard Jocell or Hans Backett.

SURRENDER IS AN OPTION

Travellers overawed by the presence of Imperial Marines and the implication that they are rebelling against Imperial authority may wish to surrender. Try to avoid this by having Vlen Backett's automated defences go off just as a Traveller is about to surrender.

IMPERIAL MARINES

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	14	INT	9	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Electronics (sensors) 1, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 2, Melee (blade) 2, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 2, Tactics (military) 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	12	EDU	8	
END	9	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Laser Rifle (5D+3), PGMP TL14 (1DD) **Armour:** Battle Dress TL14 (+25)

TAKING *THE HUNTER*

Getting the *Star Hunter* prepared for take-off requires a task chain:

Average (8+) Mechanic check (1D minutes, EDU) to check systems
Average (8+) Engineer (power) check (1D minutes) to bring the fusion reactor up to full power
Average (8+) Engineer (m-drive) check (1D minutes) to charge the grav plates
Routine (6+) Pilot (spacecraft) check (1D minutes, DEX) to fly the ship out of the cavern.

If the Pilot check is failed, the pilot scrapes the *Star Hunter* off the cavern, inflicting damage equal to the negative Effect of the check.

An Average (8+) Electronics (sensors) check (INT) picks up the *Alahir* in orbit; the violent electromagnetic activity of Alell's upper atmosphere makes it difficult to get precise readings but it looks like there is a window to fly past the larger ship and make it to the 100-diameter jump limit and escape. The electromagnetic distortions also make it difficult for the *Alahir* to blast the *Star Hunter* with its weapons.

DESPERATE FLIGHT

Before the Travellers can escape, they have to deal with both Imperial Marines and fighters.

The Marines: Read the following to the Travellers:

The ship flies into a bank of thick cloud and you hear a pair of thumps on the hull.

Two marines were stationed in reserve in the clouds, hovering there supported by grav belts. They have just landed on the hull of the *Star Hunter* and are making their way across the ship to the nearest airlock. There are several ways to force the marines off the ship:

- Spinning the ship: Opposed Pilot check (DEX) Dexterity vs the marines' Athletics (dexterity).
- Using the jump grid to demagnetise the hull: Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check (INT).
- Shooting the marines with the turret weapons: Difficult (10+) Gunner check (DEX); a miss means the blast hits the ship instead.
- Throwing the marines out as they come into the airlock: Opposed Melee (unarmed) checks (STR).

Incoming Fighters!: A trio of light fighters (see page 188 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*) dive towards the *Star Hunter*. These fighters are under orders to disable the *Star Hunter* without destroying it and will retreat after a few rounds of combat – they do not want to destroy Captain Holcess' only lead.

ESCAPE!

Once the Travellers make their way past the obstacles, read the following:

You break atmosphere, leaving the bloody world of Alell behind you. The Alahir *laboriously turns to pursue you, wallowing in the gravity well below, but there is no way they can catch you now.*

At least, not with interceptor fighters or boarding shuttles. You are still well within range of their lasers and particle beams, and no longer have the protection of the planet's atmosphere.

Captain Holcess hails you. 'Star Hunter, *stand down now. I don't want to blow you out of the sky but if you give me no other choice...'*

You are still 100,000 kilometres away from the jump limit.

What do you do?

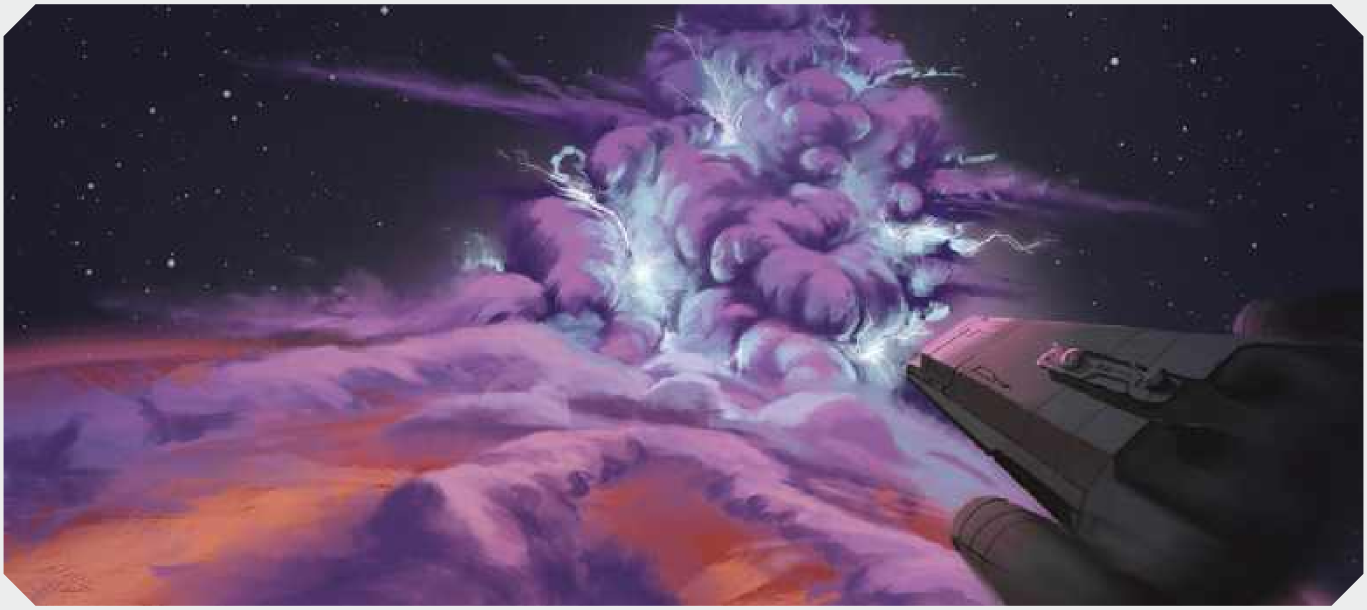
Let the Travellers decide what they want to do next. Once they make a decision, read the following:

Your sensors light up. There is something else out there, something that sent a burst of energetic particles cascading through the system. It is like the burst associated with a ship, a really big ship, jumping in, but it happened well within the jump limit... which should be impossible. You cannot see anything but your sensors are telling you that something bigger than a warship is out there.

The Alahir *seems equally confused. You pick up bursts of unencrypted transmissions between her and the starport – and then communications and sensors go dead, drowned out in a flood of static. A section of the atmosphere below is warped by an invisible force that whips up a cyclone.*

If you are going to jump, this may be your only chance.

The Son has arrived to collect Vlen Backett's mind. The Travellers will encounter the Ancient again but for now they can use it as cover to escape. Jumping out of the Alell system ends this adventure.



THE STAR HUNTER

CLASS: EMPRESS MARAVA

TL15		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	200 tons, Streamlined	—	12
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 4	6.4	3.84
M-Drive	Thrust 4 (efficient x3)	8	24
J-Drive	Jump-2 (reduced size x3)	10.5	23.625
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 120	6	12
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 4 weeks operation, plus Launch	42	—
Bridge	Holographic Controls	10	1.25
Computer	Computer/15	—	2.0
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
Weapons	Double Turret (beam lasers)	1	1.5
	Double Turret (sandcaster, missile rack)	1	1.5
Systems	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processors (60 tons/day)	3	0.15
	Docking Space (20 tons)	22	5.5
	Launch	—	2.367
	Docking Space (4 tons)	5	1.25
	Air/Raft	—	0.25
Software	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Evade/1	—	1
	Fire Control/1	—	2
Staterooms	Standard x6	24	3
	Low Berths x6	3	0.3
Common Areas		9	0.9
Cargo		41.1	—

Crew:

Pilot, Astrogator, Engineer, Gunners x2, Medic

Hull: 80

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr8661/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr103.932

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems

40

Manoeuvre Drive

20

Jump Drive

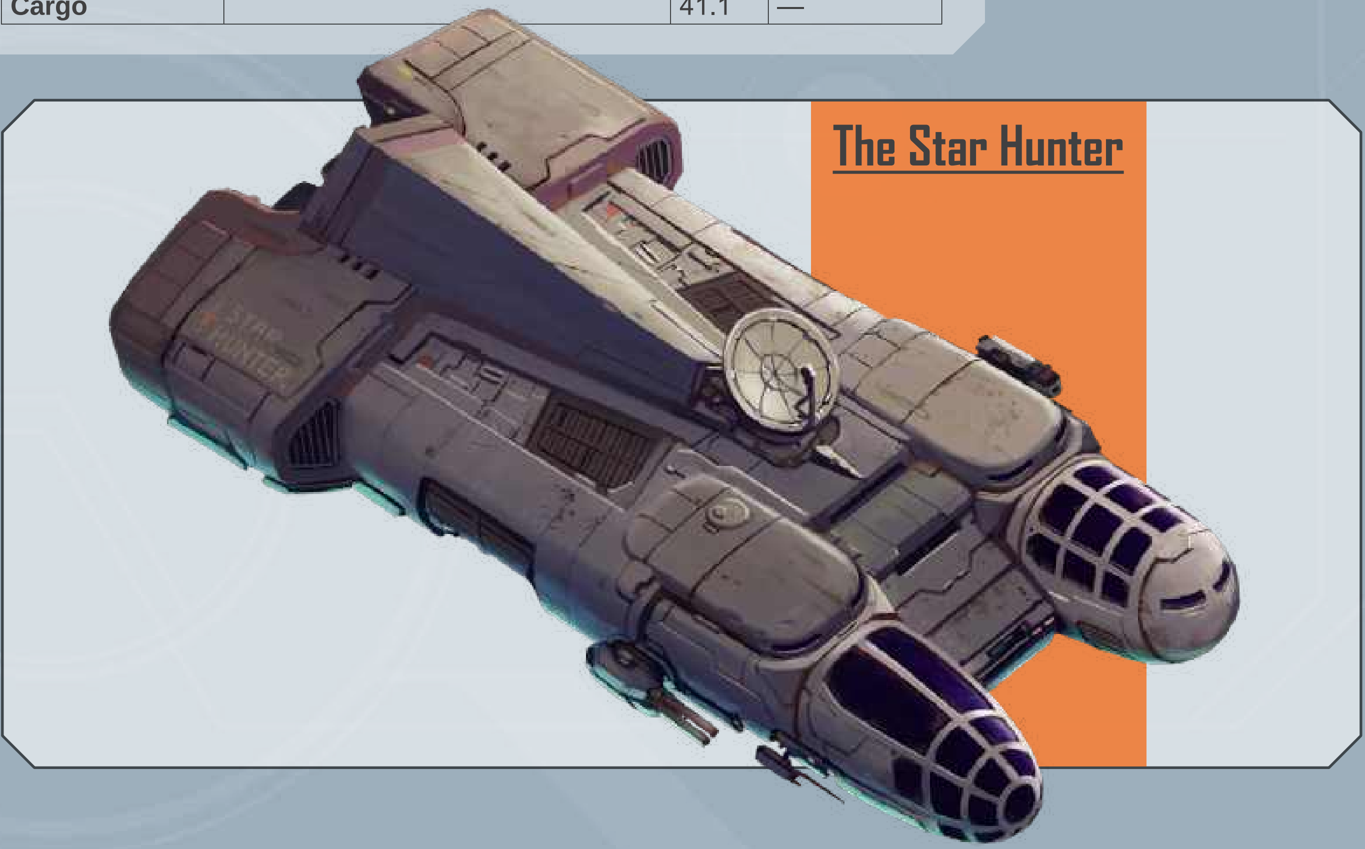
40

Sensors

6

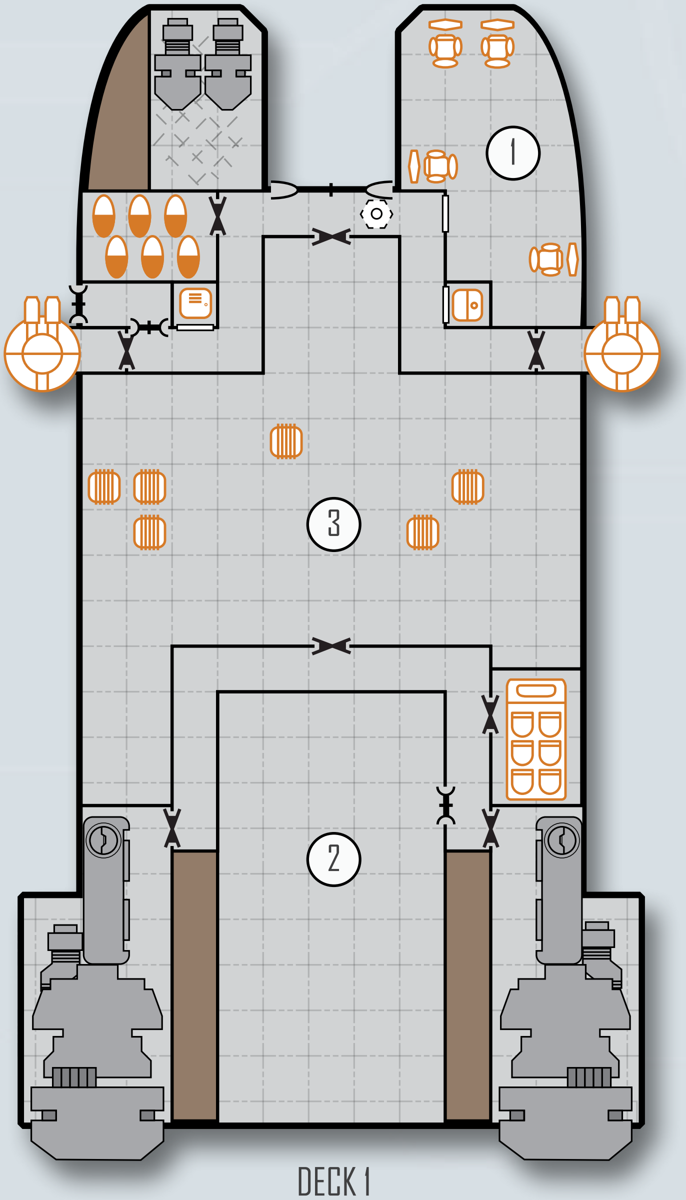
Weapons

10

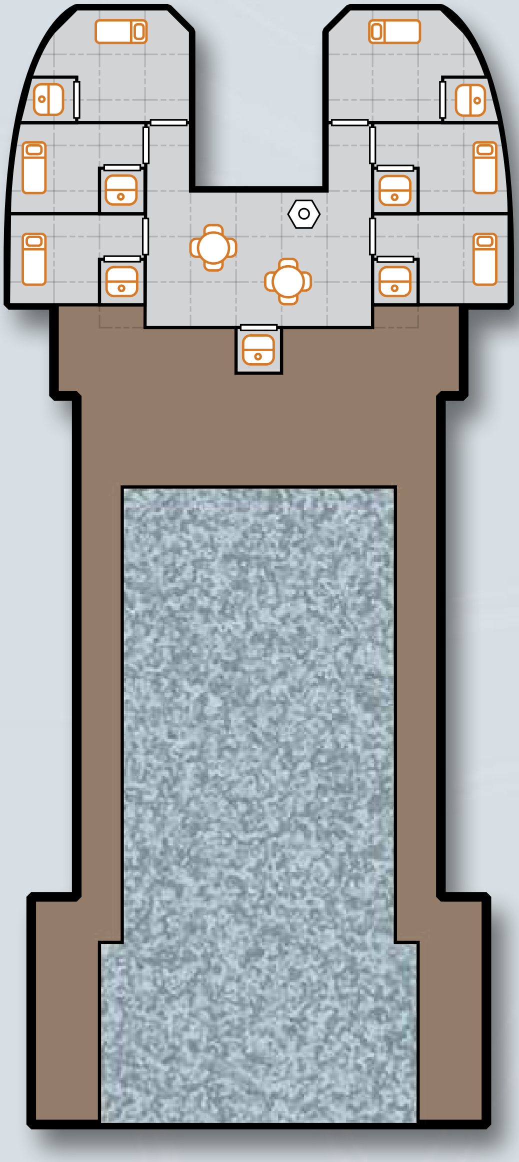


The Star Hunter

EMPRESS MARAVA CLASS FAR TRADER



DECK 1



DECK 2

1. Bridge
2. Launch Docking Bay
3. Cargo Bay

THE ALAHIR

CLASS: HEAVY SCOUT

TL15		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	1,000 tons, Streamlined	—	60
	Radiation Shielding	—	25
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 4	32	19.2
M-Drive	Thrust 5 (efficient x2)	50	125
J-Drive	Jump-4 (reduced fuel x2)	105	196.875
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 980	49	98
Fuel Tanks	J-4, 6 weeks operation, plus craft	412	—
Bridge	Holographic Controls	20	6.25
Computer	Computer/25	—	10
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
	Enhanced Signal Processing	2	8
	Life Scanner Analysis Suit	1	4
Weapons	Small Particle Beam Bay	50	20
	Double Turrets (beam lasers) x2	2	3
	Double Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	5
	Double Turrets (sandcaster, missile rack) x2	2	3
Systems	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processors (200 tons/day)	10	0.15
	Armoury	3	0.75
	Advanced Probe Drones x25	5	4
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Laboratory x6	24	6
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Sensor Stations x2	2	1.0
	Workshop	6	0.9
	Docking Spaces (10 tons) x3	33	8.25
	Light Fighters x3	—	27.27
	Docking Space (50 tons)	55	13.75
	Modular Cutter	—	10.287
Software	Jump Control/4	—	0.4
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Fire Control/1	—	2
	Evade/1	—	1
	Virtual Crew/0	—	1
Staterooms	Standard x20	80	10
	Barracks (12 marines)	24	1.2
Common Areas		24	2.4
Cargo		24	—

Crew:

Captain, Pilots x3, Astrogator, Engineers x6, Maintenance x2, Gunners x7, Medic, Marines x12, Administrator, Officers x3, Scientists x6

Hull: 400

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr56819/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr681.832

Power Requirements

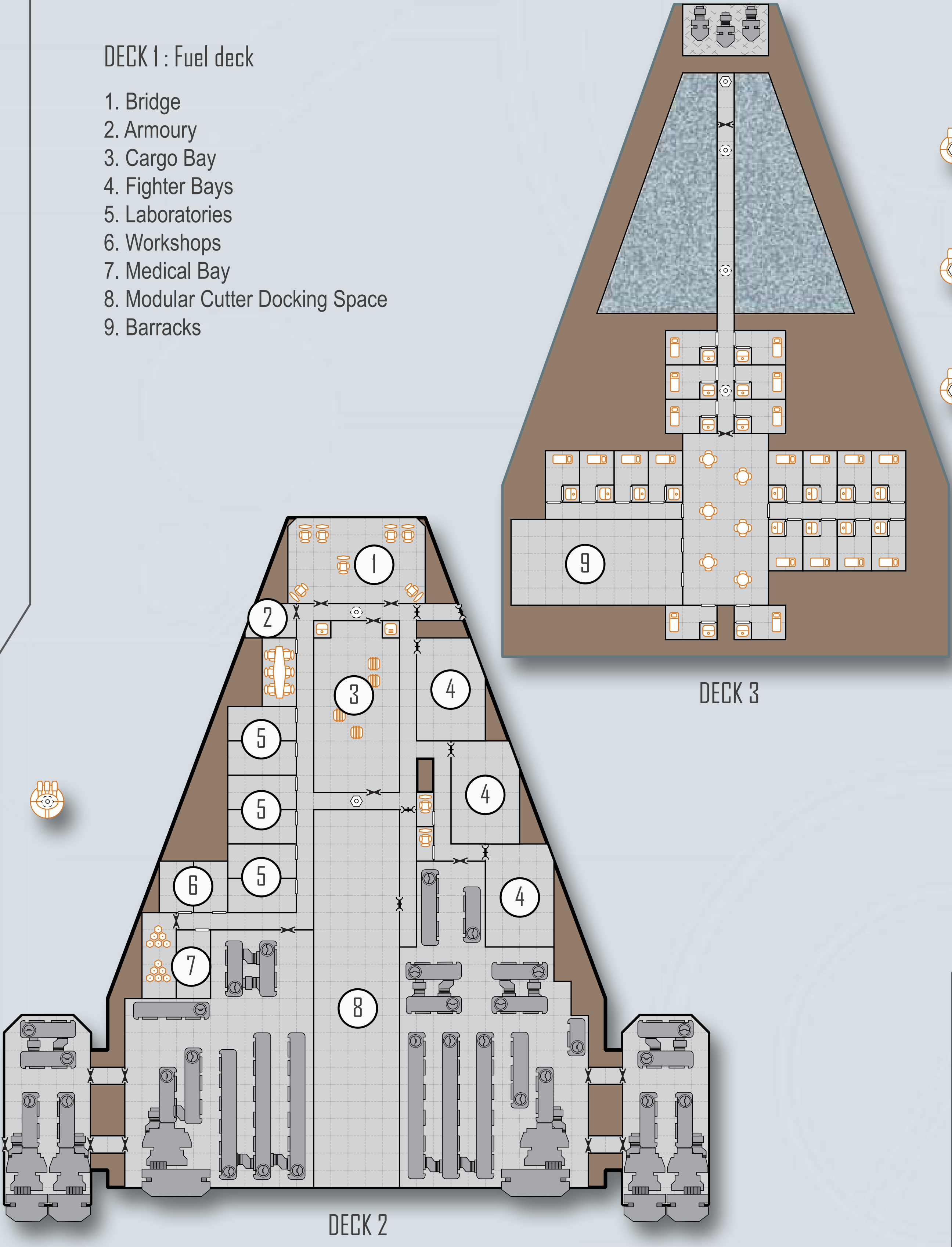
Basic Ship Systems	200
Manoeuvre Drive	250
Jump Drive	400
Sensors	9
Weapons	98

The Alahir

HEAVY SCOUT CLASS

DECK 1 : Fuel deck

1. Bridge
2. Armoury
3. Cargo Bay
4. Fighter Bays
5. Laboratories
6. Workshops
7. Medical Bay
8. Modular Cutter Docking Space
9. Barracks



DECK 3

DECK 2

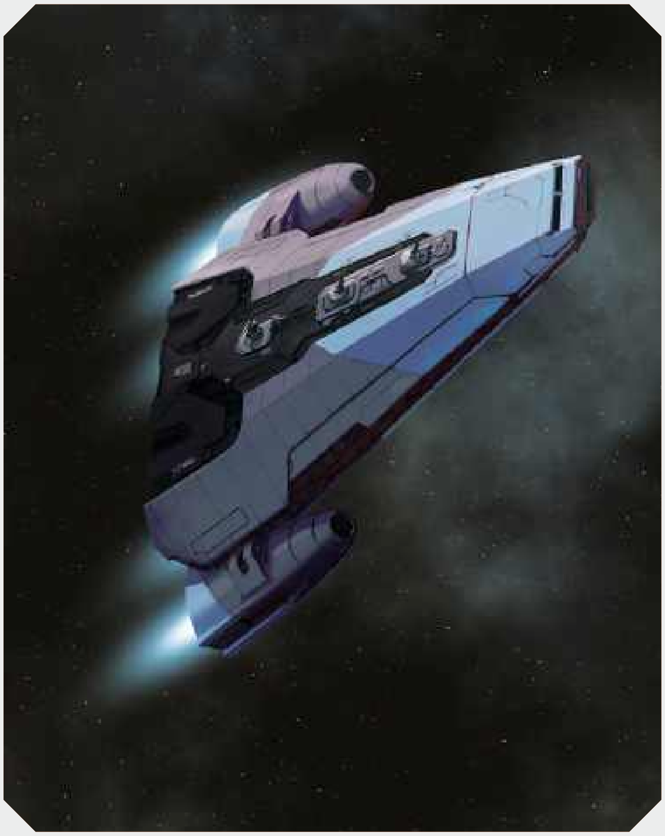
THE STAR HUNTER

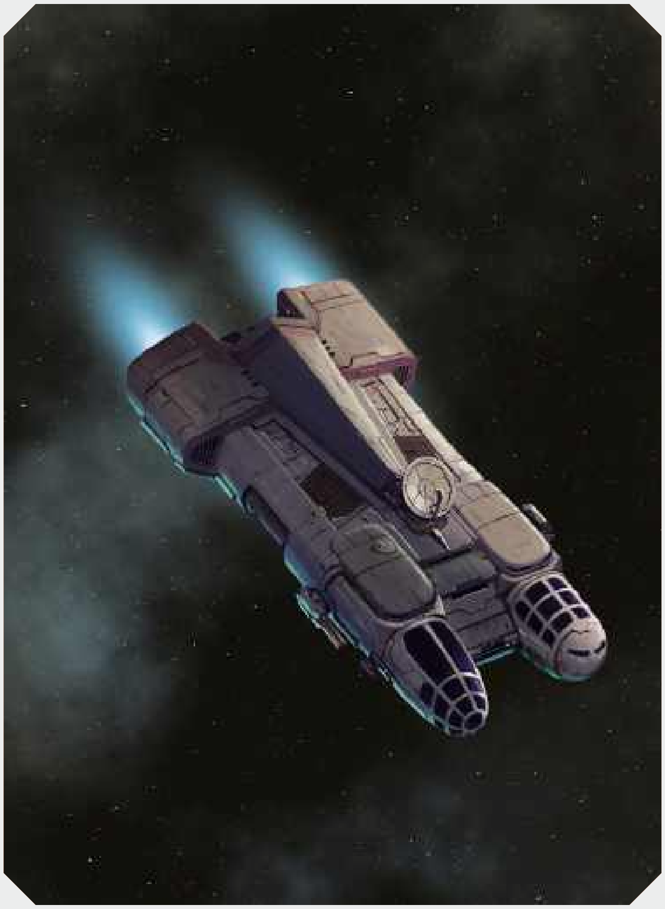
The *Star Hunter* is Vlen's personal ship. It is a heavily refitted far trader, with part of its cargo capacity replaced with fuel tankage, an upgraded manoeuvre drive and a sensor suite. While there is no Ancients technology in the *Hunter*, it is built with cutting-edge components and much more capable than its battered appearance suggests.

The original far trader's manoeuvre drive and power plant have been replaced, giving it a range of jump-2 and 4g thrust. There are six staterooms, usually equipped for double occupancy. The ship has enough fuel for a month of normal operations, plus a two-parsec jump; three tons of high-capacity fuel processors allow it to quickly cycle scooped hydrogen.

The *Star Hunter* carries a 20-ton launch and an air/raft. When docked, the launch's cargo bay opens into that of the main ship.

For defence, the *Star Hunter* has bonded superdense armour and two double turrets. The aft turret has a sandcaster and a missile rack; the forward turret has a pair of beam lasers. The ship's library is bizarrely empty, as if someone had recently blanked it and replaced it with a standard-issue TAS database.





THE ALAHIR

According to the registry of Imperial Scout Ships, the *Alahir* is officially a 'heavy scout' designed for extended missions into perilous regions of space, mapping pirate sectors, performing observations of hazardous stellar phenomena and other tasks that a basic scout ship could not accomplish. There are only two other ships of this design in the Spinward Marches.

The *Alahir* is 1,000-ton jump-4 ship, capable of 5g thrust. She carries four smaller craft – a modular cutter for fuel scooping and cargo transfer, and three light fighters (on some scouting missions, these fighters are replaced with more probe drones or a 50-ton surveyor in a docking cradle). The prow-mounted particle bay gives her surprising punch for a scout ship, while six turrets give ample coverage. Armour is augmented with radiation shielding and her computer systems are hardened.

On board, the ship carries enough fuel for more than a month of standard operations and a single jump-4, as well as extra fuel for the fighters and cutter. The *Alahir* has 20 staterooms; her usual crew includes three pilots, one navigator, six engineers, seven gunners, 12 marines and six scientists, along with other deckhands and specialists.

THE HUNT

Make no mistake – the Imperium will make the spacelanes safe. Pirates, smugglers, raiders, thieves, enemies of member states, the vastness of space is still not large enough to hide in. If you break the laws of space, the navy will hunt you down and the navy will destroy you. With this Ducal order, the navy allocates another 200 ships to pirate hunting duty.

No matter how many ships we send out hunting, however, we will not succeed without the co-operation of other space traffic. The Imperium calls on all free traders and independent ships to aid the anti-piracy effort. Report any suspicious vessels. Do not transport or purchase cargo without correct purchase orders. Carry your share of the mail and retransmit it immediately upon arrival. If all ships follow these simple regulations, we shall draw an invisible yet inescapable net around the pirates.

And then, we will shove the whole bloody lot of them out the airlock and let the bastards choke on vacuum.

— Admiral haut-Vacari's broadcast on the new Regina Subsector Security Initiative, Year 1101 of the Imperium (unedited version, not for transmission)

Having escaped Alell by fleeing into jump space, the Travellers must choose their course across the Regina subsector. They have two obvious destinations – the worlds of Boughene and Beck's World. According to the documents recovered from Backett's lodge, a belter once found Ancients relics in the asteroid belt and Backett believed there might be an Ancients site somewhere in the system.

Beck's World, further to trailing, was once definitely home to the Ancients. There is a tunnel system beneath the blackened surface of this world that has been partially excavated by researchers. One of these researchers is Juni Volsang, who possesses the secret of a technique to detect hidden Ancient structures.

The Travellers must travel across Regina, avoiding the Imperial authorities. Do they head straight for Boughene, gambling that they can stumble across the hidden Ancients site before they are captured? Or do they travel all the way to Beck's World and get the G-band detector equipment before looping back to Boughene? Both choices pose a different set of hazards.

EXTRA PASSENGERS

It is possible (if unlikely) that some of the characters from Alell are on board the *Star Hunter*. The Travellers could have wannabe-hunter Bard Jocell, gang thug Morgan or clueless Hans Backett on board. They might even have Arisa with them, either as prisoner or spy. Bard, Morgan and Hans can all be used as replacement Travellers if someone died on Alell; they can also be used as extra crew if the Travellers are short on manpower. Otherwise, they ask to be dropped off as soon as possible in a civilised system.

If Arisa is on board, she attempts to win the confidence of the Travellers and learn everything they know before fleeing the ship and making contact with Gand Holcess. If the Travellers have taken her hostage, then they can try negotiating with Holcess but this just means they will be treated slightly better when they are eventually captured and interrogated. Try to keep Arisa alive but if the Travellers do end up murdering her, you can replace her with another Imperial Intelligence officer.

HUNTED ACROSS THE STARS

As soon as Gand Holcess gave the order to arrest the Travellers, he set events in motion. Invisibly, inexorably, the machinery of the Imperium is moving to capture the Travellers. Their names and the identity of the *Star Hunter* were transmitted to Alell's starport and there they were entered into a database of wanted criminals. Copies of this database are automatically sent to all other starports and Imperial vessels. Bank accounts that are definitively connected to persons on this list are also frozen, although this can take several days. Depending on the Law Level of a world, local police authorities may also become involved in the search.

The Imperium is limited by its communications. There is no known method of delivering messages faster than the speed of light, except via jump-capable ship. The Imperium has a network of couriers, the x-boats, which bring messages between key worlds at high speed. Other ships, ranging from official mail-boats to passenger liners to tramp traders, carry messages to worlds away from the x-boat network. The warrant for the Travellers' arrest propagates unevenly out from Alell, arriving at different planets at different times.

The News Propagation table shows when word reaches each system near Alell. The times given in the table are approximate – if the Travellers head straight for, say, Efate, then they might arrive ahead of the news and so be able to operate freely in that system for several hours (remember, a ship spends approximately one week in jump space and the duration of a jump can vary by up to 10%).

Not all of the inhabited systems in the Regina subsector are listed below – this adventure assumes the Travellers take a course towards either Beck's World or Boughene. If the Travellers decide to head somewhere else (say, by arcing around through the Jewell subsector) then the Referee will have to improvise.

LIKELY ROUTES

The *Star Hunter* is capable of jump-2; the *Alahir* is faster, with a range of jump-3. Captain Holcess' tactic is to make a quick jump to the nearby system of Efate, which is on the x-boat network. The x-boats will carry the news to other systems on the network, while the *Alahir* refuels and jumps to Pixie, to alert the military base there. From Pixie, the *Alahir* moves to Boughene – according to the evidence from the wreckage of Vlen Backett's shack on Alell, he had an interest in that system.

ACCIDENTAL CRIMINALS

The Travellers are innocent of the crimes that Gand Holcess accused them of committing. They are not part of Vlen Backett's conspiracy, nor are they plotting against the Imperium. Some Travellers might prefer to concentrate on clearing their names instead of investigating rumours of the Ancients. Point out to such Travellers that they need some sort of leverage before the Imperium will listen to them and that finding a previously undiscovered Ancients base might be enough to convince Holcess that they are not who he believes them to be.

News Propagation

System	News Propagation Time	Detection DM	See Page
Efate	1 week	+6	69
Alell	—	+0	—
Yres	3 weeks	-2	69
Menorb	2 weeks	-1	69
Uakye	1 week	+2	69
Whanga	2 weeks	-7	70
Knorbes	2 weeks	-3	70
Forboldn	3 weeks	-3	—
Pixie	2 weeks	+2	70
Boughene	2 weeks	+3	—
Feri	3 weeks	+2	70
Roup	4 weeks	+0	70
Pscias	4 weeks	-1	70
Dentus	4 weeks	+0	—
Kinorb	3 weeks	+0	—
Beck's World	5 weeks	-4	71
Enope	5 weeks	-1	71
Wochiers	6 weeks	-4	71
Yorbind	4 weeks	-3	—
Shinothy	6 weeks	+0	71

The most direct route to Boughene for the Travellers is to jump to either Efate or Uakye, refuel there and then jump straight onto their destination. Both Efate and Uakye get the Travellers' arrest warrant on week one, so even if they go to those worlds directly, there is only a short time before the news catches up with them. A safer but longer alternative is to go via Whanga to Feri, or even Whanga>Roup>Feri>Boughene.

If the Travellers choose to go to Beck's World instead, then their route will go via Feri or Pscias.

JUMPING ON THE RUN

When the *Star Hunter* jumps into a new system, it may be detected by the local authorities. If the Travellers are ahead of the Imperial arrest warrant, they can go about their business without hindrance; if news of the arrest warrant has already reached the system, they risk being arrested or attacked if they go near inhabited worlds.

In each new system, run the following checklist:

1. The ship arrives in the system

Where does the ship arrive? Most Travellers jump in as close to the mainworld as possible but they could also arrive near a gas giant, a secondary world or just jump into deep space. A ship that emerges in the middle of nowhere will not be detected as quickly as one that appears close to the mainworld but deliberately aiming for deep space can be suspicious, and it also prolongs the amount of time the Travellers must spend moving to a refuelling point.

If the Travellers made an accurate Astrogation check, they arrive close to their destination. A poor Astrogation check means the ship arrives wildly off course. Pick the region of the system the Travellers arrive in from the following list:

On Approach to Mainworld: Within 200 planetary diameters of the mainworld's surface
Close to Mainworld: Within 1,000 planetary diameters of the mainworld's surface
Close to Gas Giant: Within 1,000 planetary diameters of the gas giant
Close to Secondary World: Within 1,000 planetary diameters of the secondary planet's surface
Deep Space: None of the above

2. Local Sensors May Detect The Ship

Hiding in space is extremely difficult – a ship is a hot object against a very cold background. Technologically advanced sensors can also pick up the shower of tachyons and other energetic particles generated by an emergence into real space. However, just because a ship can be detected does not mean it automatically will be. Roll 2D on the Detection table, applying the appropriate DMs.

Detection

Arrival Zone	Detected?
On approach to mainworld	4+
Close to mainworld	6+
Close to gas giant	8+
Close to secondary world	8+
Deep Space	10+

DM's

Starport Class A: +1	TL7 or less: -2	Naval Base: +2
Starport Class B: +0	TL8-10: -1	Scout Base: +1
Starport Class C: -1	TL11-12: +0	Strategic Gas Giant: +2
Starport Class D: -2	TL13-14: +1	Low Population: -2
Starport Class E: -3	TL15: +2	High Population: +2
No Starport: -4	—	—

Note that the DMs for worlds likely to be visited by the Travellers are precalculated in the News Propagation table on page 64.

If the Travellers' ship is detected, go to step 3. If the Travellers' ship is not detected, go to step 5.

3. The Ship is Investigated

Legally, all vessels must broadcast a transponder signal, identifying the ship's name, serial number, owner and home port. This transponder is embedded in the ship's jump drive and cannot be easily changed. The transponder signal can be overridden by blocking the transponder and broadcasting a false signature instead with an Electronics (comms) check. Blocking the transponder hides the ship's identity so long as no-one comes close enough to notice the jamming or scans the embedded transponder directly.

Hiding a transponder signal: Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (comms) check (1Dx10 minutes, EDU)

If a ship lands at a starport or near inhabited regions, it can be examined. Every ship, even those of a common design, has identifying marks ranging from hull paint designs and serial numbers to scars and patches. Even if the transponder has been changed, an undisguised ship can be physically examined and investigated. A ship's identifying features can be changed with a Mechanic check.

Disguising the ship: Average (8+) Mechanic check (1Dx10 hours, DEX)

The third route for investigation is to challenge the crew via radio. The Travellers will have to give false names to anyone who contacts them over a communications channel. This requires a Deception check.

Lying to the authorities: Difficult (10+) Deception check (1D minutes, SOC)

The chance of a ship being identified as a wanted fugitive depends on three factors – the Law Level of the planet (determining how thoroughly incoming ships are examined), the difficulty of deceiving the investigators and how long it has been since the word of the Travellers' arrest warrant arrived. To determine the alert level, roll 2D – if the result is equal to or less than the number of weeks since word first arrived, the planet is on Medium Alert. Otherwise, it is on High Alert.

For each of the three potential ways the Travellers might be identified, roll 2D, applying the DMs listed and the Effect of the Travellers' efforts to disguise themselves, if any. If the result is a 7 or less, the Travellers are identified as fugitives or at least suspicious and may be intercepted: go to step 3. If the Travellers are detected, but not identified, go to step 4.

4. Interception

If the ship is identified as a wanted fugitive or otherwise warrants investigation, then the local authorities will intercept it in some fashion. The interception method varies depending on where the ship is.

At the starport: If the ship is in a hangar, the hangar is locked down and the ship not permitted to leave. The Travellers are arrested by starport security if possible.

In orbit: The ship is intercepted by whatever assets the starport has available. Depending on the system, this can be anything from a battered old system defence boat to a squadron of fighters to a multi-thousand ton warship.

Near the mainworld: If the world sees a lot of traffic, or has a naval presence, then the starport may assign an asset (as per *in orbit*) to investigate the suspicious ship. In less secure systems, the starport may just challenge the vessel and order it to land at the starport, or ask another free trader or trustworthy ship to swing close to the suspicious vessel and investigate.

At the gas giant/secondary world: If the secondary world is inhabited, then there may be other ships there, as per *in orbit*. If the secondary world the Travellers visit is uninhabited, they may be the only ship there.

In deep space: Unless their ship is positively identified as a wanted vessel, then the chances of the *in orbit* being pursued into deep space are small; instead, the starport will covertly alert other bases and ports in the system, warning them to watch the suspect ship and detain it if possible.

Some sample encounters are shown in the Surface Encounter and Space Encounters tables, on page 67.

5. Refuelling

See Refuelling on the Run, on page 68.

6. Adventuring

The Travellers' bank accounts may be frozen; if they do not have cash or trade goods on hand to pay for fuel and repairs, they may need to take on odd jobs from patrons along the way to keep flying.

DM's

Investigation DMs	Investigation Method	Alert Level
Law Level: 0-3: +2	Transponder Scan, TL7-: +2	No Alert: +8
Law Level: 4-7: +0	Transponder Scan, TL8–10: +0	Medium Alert: +0
Law Level 8-10: -2	Transponder Scan, TL11–12: -1	High Alert: -4
Law Level 11+: -4	Transponder Scan, TL13–14: -2	—
—	Transponder Scan, TL15: -4	—
—	Physical Examination, via telescope: +0	—
—	hysical Examination, up close: -2	—
—	Physical Examination, detailed: -4	—
—	Verbal Interrogation, routine: +0	—
—	Verbal Interrogation, detailed: -2	—

7. Departure

Once the Travellers have finished their business, they need to get back into deep space and jump on to the next system. If they are not already wanted criminals, then this is an excellent time for news of their arrest warrant to arrive in-system. The Travellers should always be running just head of the law; keep the pressure on them at all times.

Space Encounters

Pick the most appropriate encounter or roll randomly.

1D	Encounter
1	D3+1 Fighters
2	A battered System Defence Boat
3	A Troop Transport, escorted by D3+1 Fighters
4	A Close Escort
5	A Patrol Corvette, escorted by D3+1 Fighters
6	An Imperial warship, fighting is pointless

HIDE AND SEEK

This adventure presents a semi-abstracted method of determining whether or not the Travellers are detected as they travel across the Regina subsector. The Referee should not be enslaved by these rules – use them as a way to build tension. If the Travellers come up with clever ways to avoid pursuit, then give them dice modifiers to their rolls. Every time the dice hit the table should feel like a 'ping' in a submarine war movie. Characterise everything – this is not a routine sensor sweep from a Class C starport, it is the *Star Hunter* hanging in space over Enope, the Travellers hoping their bluff about suffering transponder damage from a Vargr attack holds up.

Never give the Travellers no chance of survival. Never say 'ok, there is no source of fuel in the system other that the starport and you will be blown up or arrested if you go there. I guess you just float in space until the air runs out'. At the same time, you should throw the full weight of Imperial law enforcement against the Travellers. Keep them on the run – if they evade one patrol, there will be another along in five minutes.

Surface Encounters

Pick the most appropriate encounter or roll randomly.

1D	Encounter
1	1D starport staff. These may not be official guards; a small starport might not have dedicated security staff or the starport administrator may prefer to keep the arrest as low-profile as possible. These staff are equipped with whatever armour and weapons are commonly available on the world, given its Law Level and Tech Level.
2	1D+1 starport guards, equipped with stunners, slug rifles and flak jackets. They are trained security officers but more used to dealing with petty thieves, stowaways and smugglers than hardened criminals.
3	A single experienced Imperial officer, who either covertly observes the Travellers (if they are only suspected of being wanted criminals) or else tries to talk them into surrendering. If that fails, he is backed up by 2D+2 heavily armed starport security guards, equipped with combat armour, stun grenades and laser rifles. They may be mounted in vehicles.
4	The starport administrator, accompanied by 2D+2 armed guards, as above. The administrator wants to find out what the real story is; if the Travellers roleplay well, they may be able to either cut a deal or turn him into an ally.
5	1D Imperial Marines in battle dress with plasma guns, backed up by 3D+3 local militia forces equipped with standard armour and weapons for the planet's Tech Level and Law Level.
6	An Imperial Marine fire team (2D individuals) in battle dress and carrying heavy weapons. Their orders are to secure the Travellers by any means necessary. If they have to, they will start by smashing through the roof with plasma guns.

REFUELLING ON THE RUN

Hydrogen is the most common element in the universe.

However, most of it is burning up in stars or floating in diffuse gas clouds, so it cannot be used as fuel by a band of Travellers on the run from the law. To mangle Coleridge, 'hydrogen hydrogen everywhere, and not a drop to fill our fuel tanks'.

If the Travellers have not been identified as fugitives, they can simply head to the starport and fuel up as usual – assuming that there is a starport, that they can get in and out before word of the arrest warrant arrives in-system and that they have the cash to pay for fuel (if they do not have the money, they may need to find a local patron).

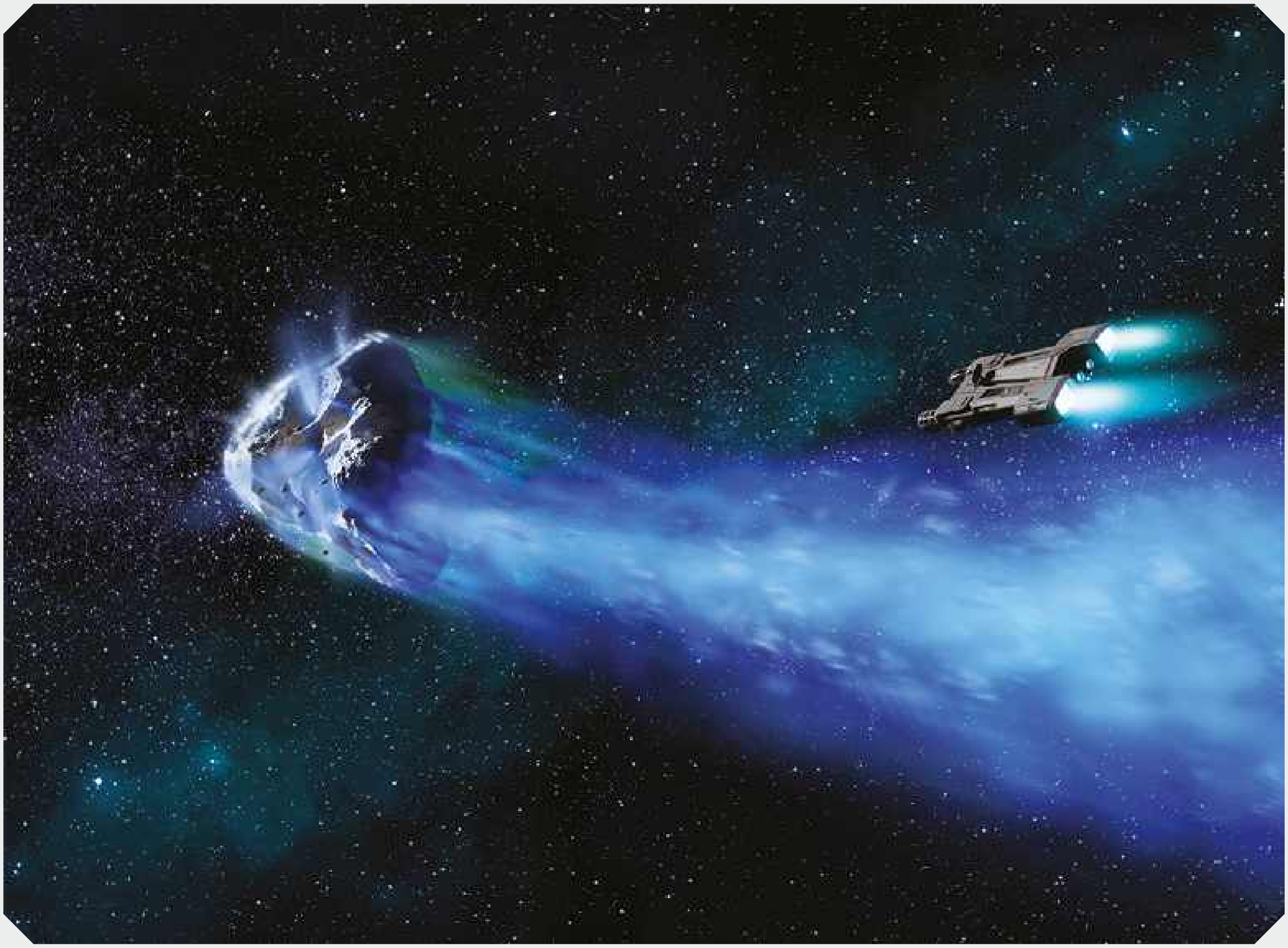
If the Travellers want to stay away from the starport, there are other sources of hydrogen.

Gas Giants: A ship with fuel scoops can harvest hydrogen from a gas giant. Scooping takes 1D hours and requires a successful Pilot check. The fuel must then be refined; note that the *Star Hunter* has both scoops and a processor to refine scooped fuel.

Water: If a planet has water on its surface (Hydrographics 2+), then it can be collected via hoses into the fuel scoops and then refined. Even if a planet has no liquid water, there may be ice frozen at the poles or underground.

Alternatively, if a planet is inhabited, there must be water present, even if it is shipped in from offworld. If the Travellers do not dare land at the spaceport, they can land at some isolated settlement and take on water.

Ice: If there are no suitable gas giants or water-bearing worlds in a system, or if the Travellers are especially paranoid about remaining undetected, they can scour the outer reaches for ice-bearing comets or asteroids. Finding such an object and rendezvousing with it takes 1D+2 days.



REGINA SUBSECTOR

As the Travellers make their way across the subsector, they may need to earn money to buy fuel, especially if their personal accounts have been frozen by the arrest warrant. The systems listed below are the ones most likely to be visited by the Travellers.

EFATE

The Travellers can easily hide among the teeming billions of Efate. This highly technological planet is a virtual anarchy and it is only the presence of the naval base in orbit that keeps in it check. Anything goes on Efate – unlike the hidebound culture of Regina, Efate is a wild freeport. Strange subcultures appear and vanish overnight. The planet has a high Tech Level (TL14); cybernetics, genetic engineering and personal augmentation are universal among the natives.

Patron: Zaar, of Lucidity Enfolded
Payment: Cr5000 per Traveller
Mission: Zaar runs a subjective-reality entertainment business, where the memory engrams of interesting and exciting individuals are copied and sold to the jaded aesthetes of Efate. Offworlders and Travellers are a popular choice for engram readings, as they bring experiences unavailable even on this cosmopolitan world. Zaar wants memories that are especially personal, traumatic or compelling.
Twist: The memories can be seen by the other Travellers; a Traveller may end up revealing more than they intended.

YRES

This planet is a waterworld; the atmosphere is radioactive, so the population live in domed cities on the ocean floor and within underground structures. Each city-state has its own government and legal system. A Vargr attack a century ago destroyed much of the planet's infrastructure and the population now lacks the technical knowledge to repair their habitats.

Patron: Engineer Qudanx of Esten/Thalis of Gerlais
Payment: Cr25000/Cr75000
Mission: Qudanx, an engineer working for the city of Esten, hires the Travellers to help fix a damaged construction robot that was repairing part of the Esten dome. The robot's subsystems are beyond Qudanx's understanding, so he needs help.
Twist: Optionally, the Travellers can accept an offer from a rival city, conveyed to them by Thalis, to sabotage the robot. This will weaken the dome of Esten, forcing the city to evacuate that district and giving Gerlais the edge in their ongoing trade war.

MENORB

A hot, dry world, Menorb's primary activity is agriculture, mostly for export to Vargr worlds. A high percentage of the native population are Vargr. Menorb is a traditional recruiting ground for the armed forces and many natives take pride in their deeds of their ancestors.

Patron: Kwraal
Payment: Cr40000
Mission: Kwraal is a Vargr pirate and mercenary who retired from his life of crime a few years ago to become a law-abiding civilian. However, his farm is failing and he is running out of money. He considered going back to piracy but he has had another idea. Menorb suffers from regular raids, so he has hired himself out as a private security consultant to other, more successful farmsteaders. When the Vargr show up, he chases them off with his fighter jet. Unfortunately, there has not been a Vargr raid in more than two years and his clients are cancelling their protection contracts. He wants the Travellers to fake a Vargr attack using their ship. They must terrify the locals but not cause any actual damage or be captured by the authorities.
Twist: A Vargr raiding party shows up after the Travellers begin their fake attack run.

UAKYE

Uakye is tide-locked towards the primary star; one half of the planet is in permanent daylight, the other in eternal night. The few colonies are all in the twilight band between the two, where the temperature is bearable. Uakye is settled mainly from Efate and there is considerable traffic between the two worlds.

Patron: Iacai Zhadhedn
Payment: Cr50000
Mission: Iacai is the rich adopted child of an artificial intelligence on Efate. She was partying with some of her friends on the nightside of Uakye; one of her friends wandered off into the ice and they cannot find him. The authorities have searched the area and found nothing but she believes her friend is still alive. A chunk of ice broke off and is floating into the dayside; Iacai's friend Matez is on the ice, in a coma. He is still alive, preserved by his cybernetic implants. To complete the mission, the Travellers must find the iceberg and retrieve Matez from his melting world.
Twist: The iceberg is melting rapidly; the Travellers cannot safely land there and must make their way across the shifting surface on foot.

WHANGA

Whanga is almost deserted; the original colony here was destroyed centuries ago and while a second colonisation effort is underway, it has yet to bear fruit. The Travellers can wander the wilderness, secure in the knowledge that there are less than 500 people on the whole planet.

Patron: Sternmetal Horizons, LLC
Payment: Cr60000
Mission: Sternmetal Horizons is trying to attract colonists to Whanga but have met with little success. The Travellers must travel to either Roup, Feri or another world within two parsecs of Whanga and convince at least 1,000 people to sign up for the colonisation efforts. The Travellers are paid with a bond redeemable only at a Sternmetal Horizons office and only after the colonists have signed up to a five-year indenture.

KNORBES

This planet is an Imperial game reserve; much of the planet is interdicted to prevent poaching. One of the most notable inhabitants is the tree kraken (see page 19 of the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society Volume 1*), whose liver is said to have anagathic properties. Travellers on the run on Knorbes can hide within the game reserve, where high technology is banned without a permit.

Patron: Baron Holden haut-Leis
Payment: Cr50000
Mission: The baron wants to go on a hunting expedition into the depths of the jungle, in search of the fabled tree leviathan. According to drunken tales of native guides, the tree leviathan is found only in the megaforests of the interior, where redwoods the size of skyscrapers grow. The baron is determined to find this beast – and bring it back alive!
Twist: The tree leviathan is a myth; the baron is convinced it exists, and will lead the Travellers to their death if they follow him.

PIXIE

Pixie is a tiny world, little more than a moonlet. It is home to a naval base and a community of miners. It is also the first place that the *Alahir* goes after Alell, so if the Travellers voyage to this system, they will be immediately identified and attacked by the navy.

FERI

Formerly a rich and peaceful world, a global conflict has broken out on Feri. Two coalitions, one loosely pro-Imperium and one pro-secession, are locked in a long-running war. Most of the conflict is relatively low-intensity; the belligerents have so far managed to keep the more devastating weapons off the battlefield (a TL11 war can render a planet lifeless), so most battles involve guerrilla warfare and tactical strikes.

Patron: James Oapa
Payment: Cr40000
Mission: Oapa's family are somewhere in Sacrifice Zone 149, a region designated a warzone following a secessionist attack. As a formal warzone, the two sides have unleashed all sorts of ghastly weapons in that area, ranging from autonomous hunter-killer drones to bioweapons. All traffic into and out of the zone is banned. Oapa wants the Travellers to fly into the zone, rescue any survivors and then take him and his family offworld.

ROUP

A highly populated waterworld, the people of Roup live on vast artificial islands made of organic material, living islands cultivated for both food and seaworthiness. The starport is built on a natural reef adjacent to a dry mountaintop city.

Patron: Tazar Uk-Asad of the Routani Corporation
Payment: Cr60000
Mission: The Routani Corporation has developed a method of rapidly seeding new islands by dropping a slurry of hormones and protein into the ocean, mixed with capsules of an engineered retrovirus that causes microscopic organisms to bind together. They believe this seeding technology is faster and more efficient than traditional island-weaving. Many citizens believe that the Routani method is dangerous, untested and may upset the delicate ecological balance of the oceans. The corporation has won – through lobbying and possible bribery – the right to conduct field tests but no ship in the system will work with them. They hire the Travellers' ship to dump several test loads of the chemical slurry into the ocean.
Twist: The Travellers come under attack by natives who believe the Routani Corporation is poisoning the oceans.

PSCIAS

This world is under interdiction by the Imperial Navy. The Travellers cannot land here; the only option is to scoop fuel from the gas giant or use an automated refuelling station where fuel can be purchased.

ENOPE

The caverns of Enope are one of the wonders of the subsector. These huge hollows have been turned into gardens and farmlands; each cavern mimics the conditions of a different world or climate, and is filled with lush plant life. The high population lives within the caverns and the tunnels that link them.

Patron: The Enope Academy of Outshell Advancement, a school for the few youths of Enope who want to leave their honeycomb world and explore space
Payment: Cr50000
Mission: The Travellers are asked to take on four apprentices, aged between 10 and 15, who will accompany them to their next port of call. On the voyage, the apprentices will work as part of the crew and learn from the Travellers. After one jump, the apprentices will return to Enope on a different ship.
Twist: One of the apprentices, Hela, stows away on board the Travellers' ship. She wants to be out in space *now*, instead of waiting another six years in a TL6 school, reading dusty, second-hand accounts of space travel.

WOCHIERS

The high pressure of the planet's atmosphere makes it ideal for crystal growing and certain other large-scale industrial processes. It also makes the planet almost intolerable to humans; those unused to the punishing conditions suffer from earache, nose bleeds and other discomforts. The crystals grown on Wochiers are used by the Imperial Navy.

Patron: Ao Atan
Payment: Cr50000
Mission: Atan is a former engineer in the Wochiers Crystal Works, which makes huge focusing crystals for the Imperial Navy's spinal mount weapons. He was fired for embezzlement. He claims that he was framed by a Zhodani agent working in the crystal factory. Atan suspects the Zhodani is sabotaging crystals by deliberately introducing almost undetectable flaws. The Crystal Works officials and the navy have both dismissed his concerns as paranoia and bitterness. He wants the Travellers to break into the Crystal Works and find the spy.
Twist: Atan is indeed the victim of Zhodani espionage but not in the way he thinks. One of his closest friends, Durel, is a Zhodani spy. Durel manipulated Atan's mind and planted the idea to steal money. Now that Atan is out of the Crystal Works and so out of the reach of Imperial security, Durel can steal the technical specifications of the crystals out of the engineer's mind.

SHINOTHY

The Shinothy system is also under interdiction; microscopic particles of antimatter exist throughout the system and are extremely hazardous to shipping. The starport is in a zone that has been cleared of antimatter but travel outside this zone is dangerous.

Patron: Yorbling the Epicure
Payment: Cr50000
Mission: Yorbling, a grotesquely fat creature kept alive by machinery, has decided to go out with a bang. He has eaten everything known space has to offer but there is one taste he has yet to experience – the subtle, impossible flavour of antimatter. He wants the Travellers to collect a few micrograms of antimatter for Yorbling's last meal.
Twist: Yorbling is dying of an infestation of intestinal parasites, which is contracted by eating a delicacy from a world hundreds of parsecs spinward of Charted Space. What he does not know is that the parasites are growing into dog-sized predators within his capacious guts. Soon, they will explode out of his stomach and attack the Travellers.

BECK'S WORLD

From orbit, Beck's World looks like a red-streaked black marble. The planet's surface was scorched and burnt aeons ago; most of the planet consists of jagged mountains and endless lava fields. Huge volcanic vents pump black smoke into the air and ash clouds are so thick that whole months can pass without a glimpse of sun. Most of the volcanic activity has subsided now but the planet is still a few hundred thousand years away from having anything resembling a biosphere. The only native lifeform on the surface is a lichen-like plant clinging to the underside of the cooler rocks.

There is a colony on Beck's World, a lichen growth of habitation domes and prefabricated shelters on the shore of a milky-blue lake that is the only body of water on the surface. A few thousand desperate souls live on Beck's World. It was a pirate base for many years, until the Imperium offered the ruling gang legitimacy in exchange for an end to raids on shipping and the establishment of a listening post in orbit, to watch for Zhodani intruders. Today, the inhabitants of Beck's World are a mix of the exiled and the desperate, homeless Travellers who washed up on this black shore and got stuck here. The 'government' is a paramilitary gang who control the life support machinery and the guns. There are a few Imperial technicians to maintain the listening post and a single official representative, Fedic Jocan, from the Duchy of Regina.

BECK'S WORLD

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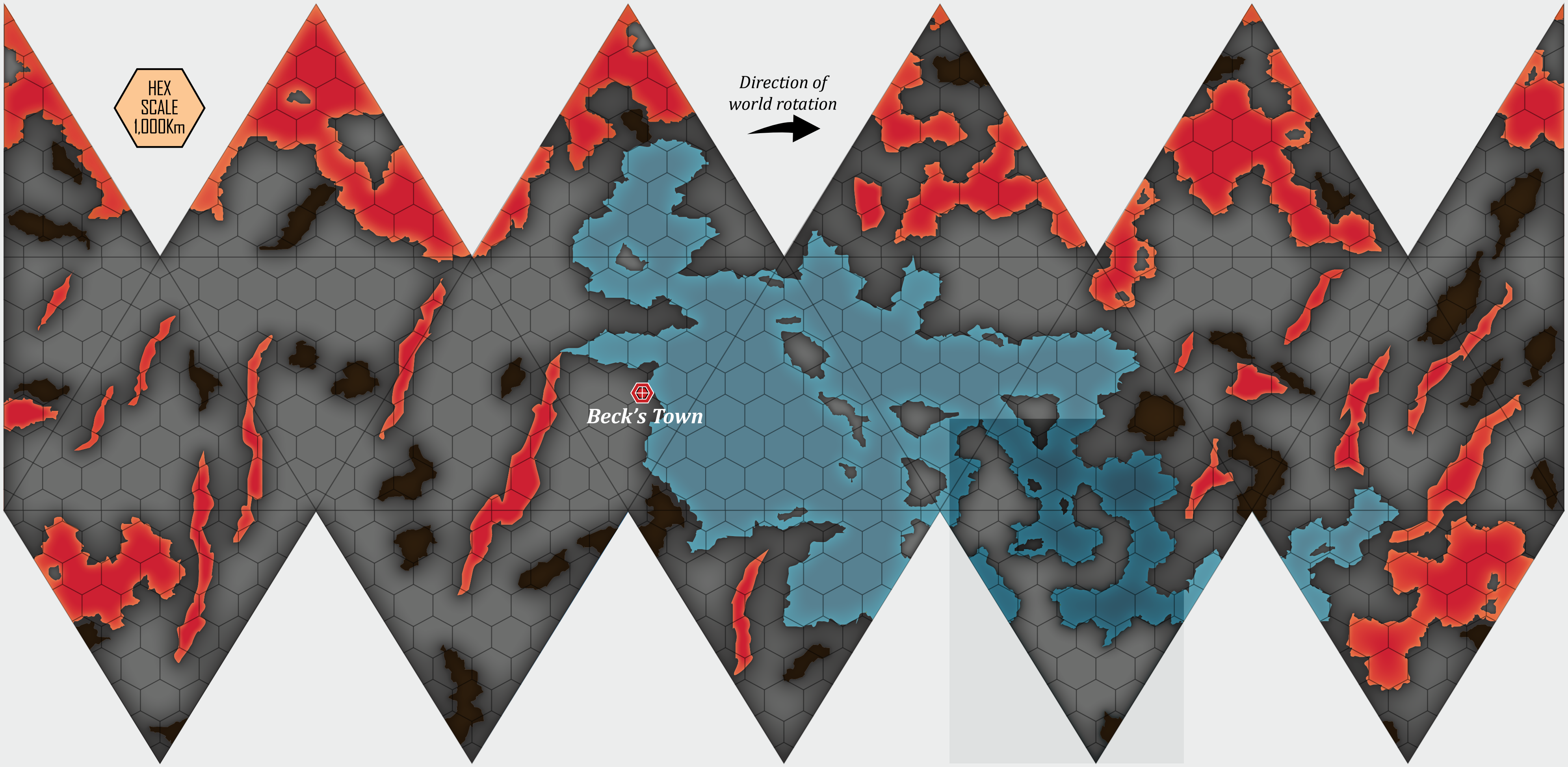
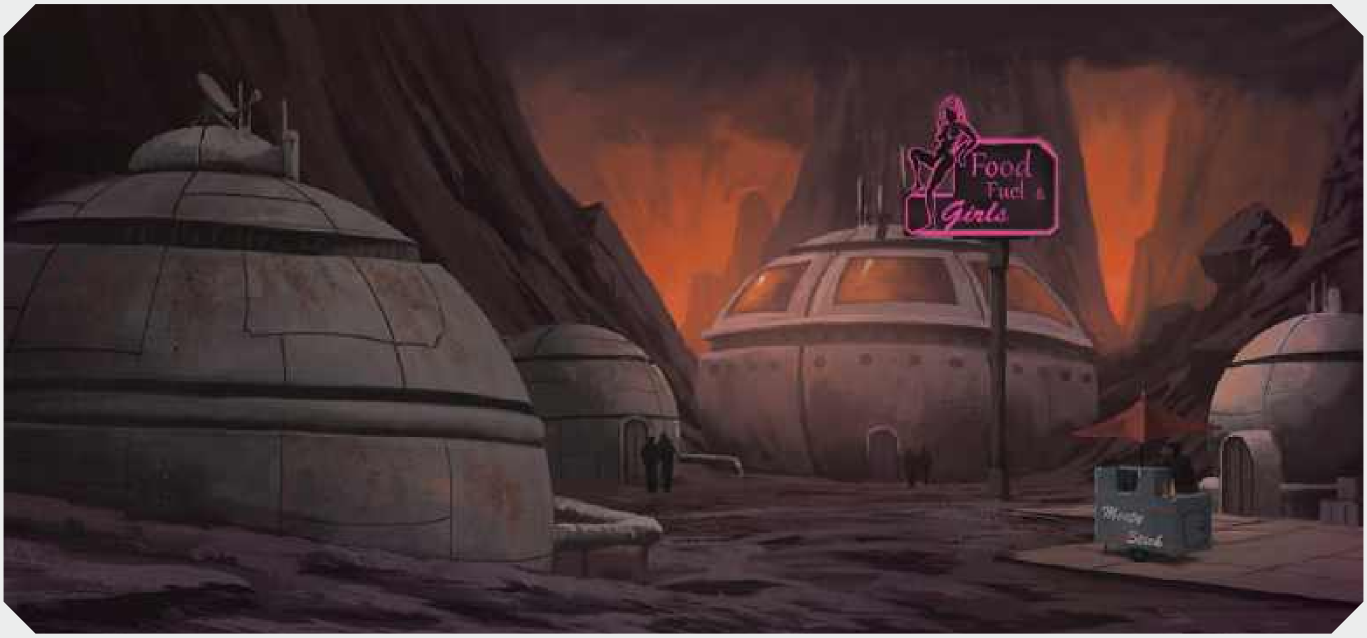

HEX SCALE 1,000Km
Direction of world rotation
Beck's Town

- ⬢ Sea
- ⬢ Land
- ⬢ Mountain
- ⬢ Lava
- ⬢ Starport



For thousands of years, this planet was just a number in a Vilani database, an unremarkable rock on the edge of the Spinward Marches. Even the arrival of the ill-fated pirate Beck and his band of cut-throats barely rated a footnote in the library files. The system seemed utterly irrelevant, until a mining corporation surveyed the planet in 1020. They found that Beck's World had 'no commercially viable resources' but did discover that the volcanic activity of the planet appeared to have been artificially induced. The surveyors suggested that a superheavy object such as a dwarf star had passed closed to the planet, churning up the molten core. Geologists from the University of Regina began a series of investigations in 1069. Deep beneath the scorched crust of Beck's World, they found signs that the Ancients had a base here, hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Since then, there has been a constant presence from the university on Beck's World. On the edge of town is a small cluster of newer buildings where the researchers live and work. The existence of the Ancients ruins are an open secret on Beck's World – and a source of tension between the researchers and the other inhabitants. The locals believe the archaeologists have found Ancients relics worth billions of Credits in the caves and that they should get a share of the profit. In fact, no especially valuable relics have been found but what are facts compared to rumours of vast wealth and a ticket off this rock? The researchers are unaware of the increasing hostility of the locals. So far, the ruling gang has done nothing about the university base, fearing Imperial retribution, but they want the university gone as it threatens their grip on power. All it would take to trigger violence is a single spark.

IN ORBIT

The only other ship in orbit of Beck's World is a yacht, the *White City*. If hailed, the *White City* responds that the owner, Bay Venshar, is on the surface and not available at present.

LANDING AT BECK'S TOWN

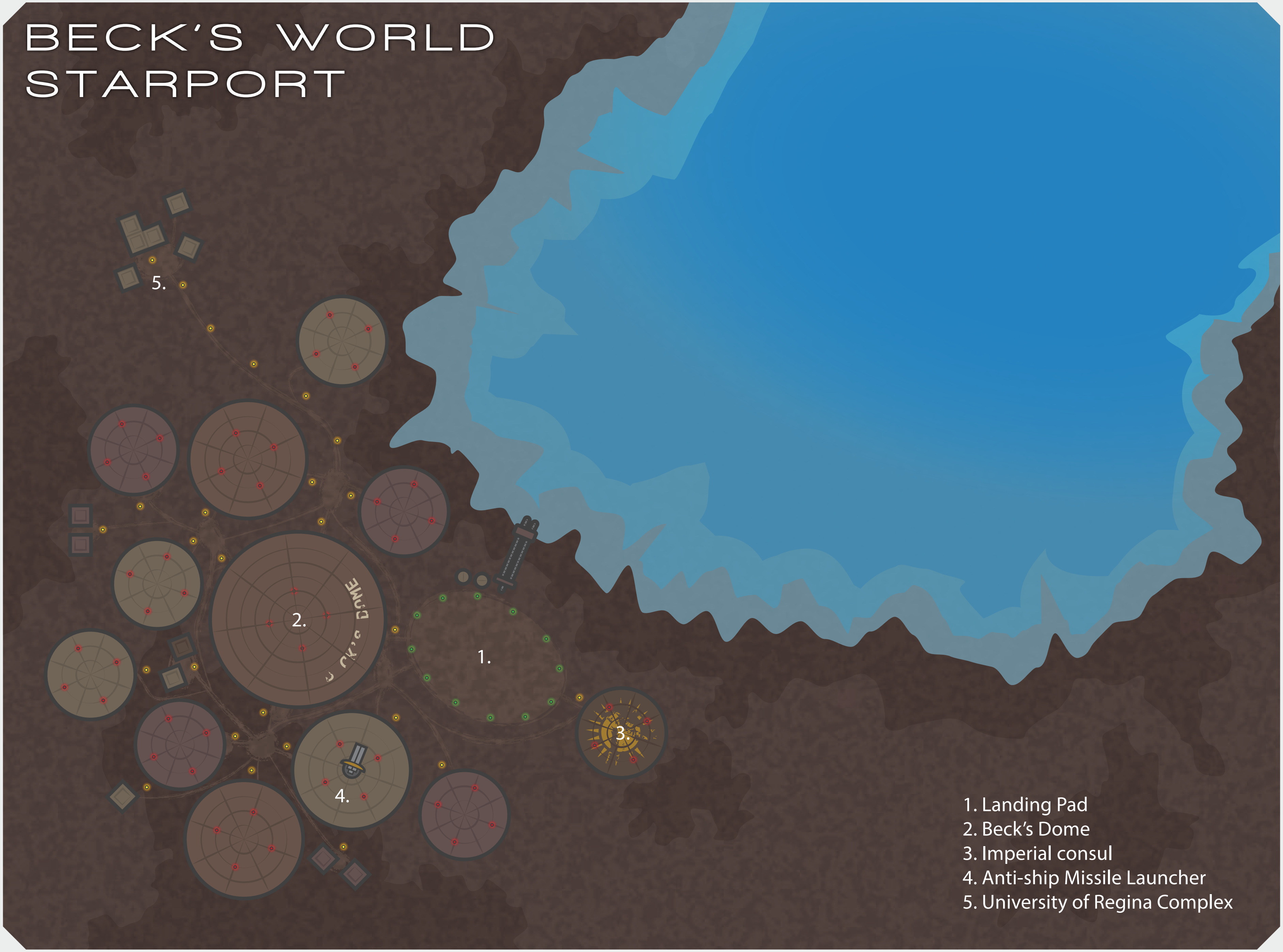
Read out the following:

Landing at the Beck's World starport is a leap of faith. To get there, you have to dive into thick black clouds of dense ash and soot, guided by a faint locator beam signal. When your ship finally breaks through the cloud cover, you wonder why you bothered – Beck's Town is an ugly carbuncle of soot-stained domes on the edge of a blue lake. The starport is just an irregular oval of semi-level ground. A holographic sign flashes on and off, advertising that you can get 'food, fuel and girls' here.

As soon as you land, a figure in an HEV suit slogs across the landing field and hammers on the airlock. You can barely make out his features beneath the dirt and mud on his faceplate but he waves a laminated ID card at you. Apparently, he is the official customs inspector.

This charming fellow is Uro Phell. His job is to inform visitors of the law on Beck's World and to see if they have anything worth stealing. Most of those who come to Beck's World are just as poor, desperate and dangerous as the locals, but occasionally some lost free trader or adventuring party lands here and are never seen again.

BECK'S WORLD STARPORT



5.
2.
CK'S DOME
1.
3.
4.

1. Landing Pad
2. Beck's Dome
3. Imperial consul
4. Anti-ship Missile Launcher
5. University of Regina Complex

Phell begins by explaining the customs of Beck's World. His speech is almost incomprehensible, as he mixes in loanwords from Zdetl (the Zhodani language) and Gvedh (one of the Vargr dialects) and his suit's speakers are clogged with dirt.

'Hey, ieprs, this Beck's World. Be it known that the thanes have laid down the law. No guns, nor knives, nor any other killsticks on Beck's World, save those held by the qafs.' He slaps the shotgun at his side for emphasis. *'Fuel's three hunned creds a ton, impure. Aught else ye need, the thanes can supply. What's yer cargo and where're ye bound? Give me yer names and who ye owe fealty to, likewise.'*

URO PHELL

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	29

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	7	Broker 2, Carouse 1, Deception 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Mechanic 1, Melee (unarmed) 2, Persuade 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	7	EDU	5	
END	8	SOC	4	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Shotgun (4D, Bulky) **Armour:** Hostile Environment Vacc Suit (+9)

Playing Phell

- Intimidate the Travellers. Push yourself into their personal space, take offense at minor slights, throw your weight around. You are one of the big fish in this tiny, sulphurous pond.
- Mock any suggestion that Phell is breaking Imperial law. The Travellers are on the very fringe of Imperial space and the sunburst has little weight out here.
- If the Travellers mention the University of Regina, Phell unclasps the environmental seals on his suit, unscrews his helmet, ostentatiously spits on the floor, then replaces his helmet and reseals his suit. He obviously despises the university.
- If they hint that they are on the run from the Imperium, then Phell is amused and notes that they should stay away from the Imperial agent in town, Fedic Jocan. He is '*a dangerous chabbifi'* who eats wanted criminals for breakfast.
- If they want anything else, then they should talk to the 'thanes', the gang who run Beck's World.

While the Travellers answer his questions, Phell paws through their belongings, pokes around the ship and generally makes them feel unwelcome. He suggests that if they just want fuel, they should stay in their ship and pay the unreasonably high price for unrefined hydrogen (Cr300/ton). If they want anything else, they can go into town but will have to pay an entrance fee of Cr200 per Traveller.

THE OTHER SHIP

There is one other ship at the starport; a ship's boat belonging to the *White City*. There is no-one on board.

MAKING FRIENDS (AND ENEMIES)

Once the Travellers leave the starport, they can head into Beck's Town. There are four obvious destinations:

- Closest to the starport is the largest dome, which is the colony's bar, trade hall, whorehouse and hotel. It is called, simply, Beck's Dome.
- Clustered around Beck's Dome are several smaller, better-maintained habitat domes. There is an anti-ship missile launcher mounted on top of one dome. The ruling gang live in this section; Uro Phell heads back to these domes after dealing with the Travellers.
- On the far side of the starport is a battered dome marked with the Imperial sunburst. If the Travellers scrape away the inch-thick crust of soot on the sign outside, they learn this is the official residence of the Imperial consul.
- Finally, just outside town, unconnected to the rest of the domes, is a small complex of prefabs belonging to the University of Regina.

BECK'S DOME

Read the following to the Travellers:

The sign promised 'food, fuel and girls'. Outside, you saw that the fuel was unrefined hydrogen and it looks like the food and the girls are equally suspect. The air is hot and greasy; there is some sort of meat on sticks for sale in one corner. It looks like roast space weevil. As for the girls, there are three of them, all surgically endowed using some cheap backstreet autodoc. They all have the same cosmetically-beautified face. Three sets of trapped eyes stare at you from behind production-line features.

Beyond the food stands and prostitutes is a semi-deserted hive of scum and villainy. There are only a handful of patrons in the bar other than yourselves, and they all look at you hungrily. The bartender is a drunken Vargr who is busy licking the glasses clean when you enter.

BAY VENSHAR AND THE WHITE CITY

The Travellers are not the only people on Beck's World looking for Juni Volsang. There is a thriving black market in Ancients relics and curiosities. Bay Venshar is a dealer in such rare goods; he heard rumours that Professor Ujinka of the University of Regina had discovered a method of detecting Ancients sites. Venshar is here on Becks' World to acquire this method from Juni Volsang.

Venshar is more than 200 years old, thanks to his use of exotic anagathics from the Foreven sector. He looks like a 12-year-old boy, as the drugs have regressed his body to just before puberty. He is fascinated by the Ancients and claims that all the races touched by the Ancients – Humaniti, Vargr and the like – are part of a grand and glorious plan. This messianic vision is actually Venshar's version of a sales pitch. While a working Ancients relic is worth millions of Credits, Venshar has made a career out of turning fragments of interest only to archaeologists into religious relics for the rich and gullible.

While in Beck's Town, Venshar cut a deal with the ruling gang. He intends to kidnap Juni Volsang and loot the Ancients ruins. He offered the gang money and a deniable way of getting rid of the university base in town. One of Venshar's crew is a geologist and demolitions expert; she planted explosive charges in the rocky cliffs above the university base. Soon, these charges will be remotely activated, burying the base in an apparently 'natural' landslide. Even if the Imperium or university uncovers proof that the base was attacked, the gang can just blame the long-departed Venshar.

The White City arrived at Beck's World 48 hours ahead of the Travellers. The ship's boat carrying Venshar and his mercenaries takes off and heads for the dig site soon after the Travellers arrive. See page 79.

The denizens of Beck's Dome are typical of this world; desperate, nasty drifters who would cut your throat for low passage offworld and a shot of rotgut whiskey. If asked about Juni Volsang or the University of Regina, they grumble about 'offworld eggheads stealing treasure' and 'the Imperium keeping the common man down'.

The bartender, Fangs, is more forthcoming with useful gossip and can drunkenly explain that everyone thinks the university researchers are taking Ancients artefacts that should, by rights, belong to the good citizens of Beck's World. If asked about Volsang, Fang remembers that one of the archaeologists was a young and pretty scientist ('*if you like 'em mostly hairless' adds the leering Vargr*) but he has not seen her around town. That probably means she is out at the dig site, which is off limits to anyone other than university personnel. He is not exactly sure where it is; probably several hundred kilometres north-west of the starport.

Fangs can point the Travellers at a guide, another Vargr called Gvarrul who lives on his own in the mountains. Gvarrul can take the Travellers to the dig site but will charge them a Cr1000 for his services. Gvarrul is a bitter, eccentric old dog who despises everyone else and just wants to be left alone.

THE RULING GANG

Read this to the Travellers:

This part of town is obviously fortified. The streets between the domes are narrow and have plenty of cover and kill-zones. The airlocks are armoured, and you spot several grey pillboxes that could be gun emplacements. You get the distinct feeling you are being watched. The streets are empty and conspicuously free of graffiti.

Up ahead, you spot the 'customs inspector', Uro Phell, and four other similarly-attired thugs. They stare at you as you approach.

The gang have just concluded a deal with Venshar to look the other way while he wipes out the university base; they certainly do not want any suspicious offworlders hanging around as inconvenient witnesses. If the Travellers try contacting the gang, they are forcibly rebuffed by armed guards and told to go back to Beck's Dome or their ship. The streets of Beck's Town are not safe at the moment.

This is an excellent moment to run *Departing Guests* on page 79.

GVARRUL

Gvarrul was a Vargr corsair before he was wounded in battle; his former packmates turned on him and stranded him here on Beck's World. For the last 30 years, Gvarrul has lived on his own, nursing his grudge against his old crew. He survives by prospecting for diamonds in the mountains and knows the wilderness of Beck's World better than anyone else.

He can guide the Travellers to the entrance to the cave network but will refuse to go underground unless they promise him passage offworld. If he comes to trust the Travellers, he may even ask to join them; he can also be used as a replacement if a Traveller is killed.

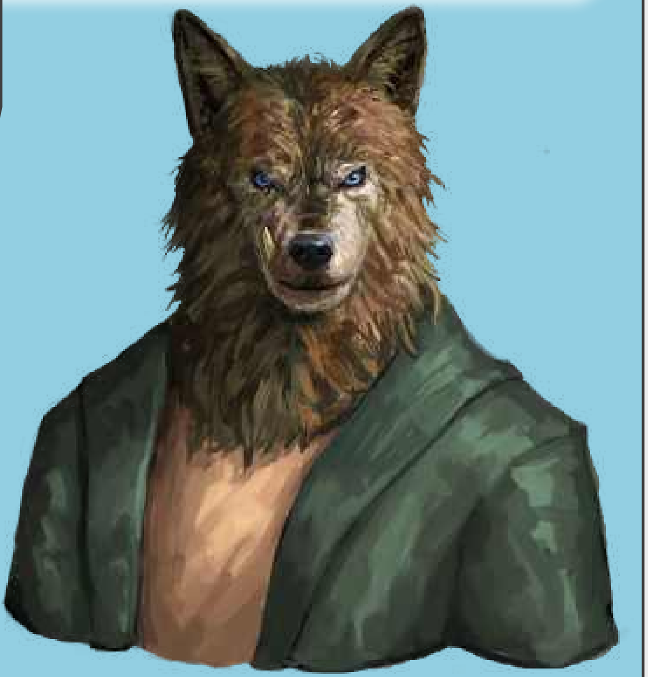
GVARRUL

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	Male	55

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	**INT**	7	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Melee (natural) 1, Navigate 1, Survival 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	**EDU**	4	
END	6	**SOC**	3	

Playing Gvarrul:

- Growl everything you say.
- If there's one thing you've learned, it is that friends always betray you. If anyone is too friendly, they are planning to stab you in the back.
- Respect the natural world. Spacers flit from world-to-world and port-to-port; it takes 30 long years of living on a rockball to appreciate the dangers of groundside.



THE IMPERIAL CONSULATE

Read the following to the Travellers:

The door to the consulate is open and from inside you can hear someone being tortured. Wait, no, they are singing and it is the song that is being tortured. The familiar strains of 'My Own Sweet Darrian Lass' are being mangled by a drunken singer who is at least three octaves out of tune. Inside, under a portrait of Emperor Paulo III, sits a young man in a white spacesuit. He is swigging something blue from a clear plastic bottle in his right hand; his left hand is handcuffed to a black case.

This sorry fellow is Fedic Jocan, official representative of the Duchy of Regina. The case contains important documents that are not to fall into Zhodani hands if Beck's World falls. Being consul to Beck's World is the kiss of death for a career in the diplomacy corps; Jocan was effectively exiled here as punishment for insulting a superior. He spends his time getting drunk and pleading with the ruling gang not to hurt anyone of importance.

Jocan can – in a drunken, rambling and incoherent way – fill the Travellers in on the history of Beck's World – its origins as a pirate base, the establishment of a listening post and its subsequent entry into the Imperium, the mineral survey, the archaeologists and the ensuing dispute between the locals and the

University of Regina. His main role on the planet, other than running away should the Zhodani show up, is to keep the gang in check and mediate disputes. As he has no way of fulfilling either duty, he decided to follow the example of half the local population and develop a nice little alcohol habit. Synthetic liquor filtered through volcanic rock is surprisingly drinkable.

Despite his ineffectual bearing and drunkenness, Jocan can be a useful source of information for the Travellers. If they help him take charge of the crisis that is about to erupt, he may be convinced to aid them. He could even transmit a false message to the Imperium, throwing the authorities off the Travellers' trail for a few weeks.

Likely questions for Jocan…

Do you know Juni Volsang? *Volsang...Volsang... oh, one of the university researchers. She repaired the listening satellite last year. I recommended her for a medal, in fact. I recommend everyone for medals. Would you like one? You won't get it but it's terribly annoying for the clerks, which is why I do it. Come on, let's all get medals!*

What's this about the University taking Ancients relics offworld? *Oh, by Cleon's beard! Not you too! The university finds a few potshards and carved rocks, and suddenly everyone's convinced they've found something magical down there. Look, even if the university found, I don't know, a black globe factory, it would belong to His Imperial Majesty, Strephon, and his designated agent here is the University of bloody Regina. I didn't make the bloody law, all right?*

Why does the Imperium tolerate the gang? *Because, currently, all my masters care about is the listening post and the university dig, and as long as nothing interferes with them, the rest of this benighted rock could be run by cannibal newts or sentient fungi or flea-buggered Vargr. Actually, cannibal newts would be an improvement. The bastards might eat each other and I wouldn't have to babysit them.*

There's another ship in orbit, the *White City.* What do you know about that? *Hmm. Not bloody enough, is the answer. Everyone's supposed to register with me on arrival – they don't, of course, but that's no excuse. Actually, you space tramps are always doing odd jobs for money, right? Meet someone at the spaceport, do a little work on the side, that's how it works, yes? If you find out what a bloody yacht is doing here, I'll pay you... 500 credits? Is that fair?*

FEDIC JOCAN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	49

TRAITS				—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	8		Admin 1, Carouse 2, Deception 1, Diplomat 1, Melee 0, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	6	EDU	9		
END	7	SOC	9		
EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Rapier (2D) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+12)				

Playing Jocan:

- When talking, slur your words and sway from side-to-side.
- Turn everything into a self-pitying diatribe, if possible.
- Underneath it all, remember that you are the Imperial consul, the representative of the Emperor on this distant outpost. When put under pressure, stand up straight and have some dignity and composure.

THE UNIVERSITY OUTPOST

Read the following to the Travellers:

This little complex of prefabricated shelters is plainly out of place in town. It is shiny and new, and has not got the same crust of soot and dirt that cakes the rest of Beck's World. On top of the dome, you see a pair of figures in light-weight environment suits repairing a communications dish. As you approach, one of them slides down the side of the dome and comes to greet you.

The Travellers are met by Kenton Wyld, a graduate student of geophysics from the University of Regina. His initial reaction to the Travellers depends on their appearance. If they look like dangerous thugs, he assumes they are more locals here to complain about the university taking Ancients artefacts offworld and responds forcefully. '*Look, the university has permission of the subsector duke to dig here! You can't intimidate us into leaving!*'

If the Travellers are obviously offworlders, not locals, then Kenton is much more friendly. The students rarely see visitors. He welcomes them to Beck's World but cautions them that if they are here to see the Ancients site, they will be disappointed. The dig site is off limits to non-university personnel. He invites the Travellers into the university building so they can talk in comfort. There are three other researchers working here but they are all busy.

Like the rest of the outpost staff, Kenton treats his time on Beck's World as a challenging stepping stone to a brighter academic career. He would prefer to either be out in the field or back on Regina, instead of running the communications relay and laboratory in Beck's Town. He will happily talk to the Travellers if they bring news of events offworld.

Kenton Wyld can tell the Travellers the following:

Juni Volsang: Dr. Volsang is one of the senior researchers; she is out at the dig site right now. Dr. Volsang is a genius. Everyone at the outpost has the utmost respect for her (and half of them have a crush on her).

Professor Ujinka: Wyld studied under Professor Ujinka back on Regina. He disagrees with the professor's conclusions (Wyld would count himself as a homogenous catastrophist, although his major is in geophysics not archaeology or xenology) but respected her work. He is surprised and saddened if the Travellers tell him of Ujinka's murder.

The locals: Beck's World is a hellish place. He has not left the university compound in weeks and really thinks they should just leave town entirely and establish a secondary base closer to the dig site. The locals all think the university is stealing Ancients artefacts worth Megacredits from the caves. The students have taken to sleeping in shifts after a series of break-ins.

The dig: The dig is in a cave system, deep underground. It is off-limits to everyone except university staff. They have established a base camp at a point one kilometre into the cavern complex.

Communicating with the dig: Normally, it should be possible to communicate with the dig but they are not answering his radio calls. He was up on the roof checking the communications dish but it is working properly, suggesting the problem is at the dig site. The camp is so far underground that conventional signals cannot penetrate the rock, so they have set up a network of relays. If one of those relays malfunctioned – a common problem in the caves – then the base camp would be unreachable until the network routed around the problem or the relay was repaired. If the Travellers want to talk to Volsang, he suggests they wait at their ship until communications are restored.

The *White City*: He does not know who the *White City* belongs to but he did see some strangers watching the university outpost last night. He assumed they were more trespassers – rumours of the Ancients always draws lunatics and conspiracy theorists.

Playing Kenton Wyld:

- The Travellers are the first people you have met in months who are not drunken or violent criminals. Be very excited to meet them! Show off your cool research and talk enthusiastically about the dig.
- Make it clear that the dig is off-limits.
- Speak so quickly you fall over your own words. Wave your hands excitedly. Use technical jargon.

DEPARTING GUESTS

The Travellers may run into Bay Venshar anywhere in Beck's World. This scene is just foreshadowing for a later confrontation, so do not make too much of it at this point.

Physically, Venshar looks like a 12-year-old human; he wears an expensive custom vacc suit and has a grav belt. He is accompanied everywhere by his two Vargr bodyguards, Krl and Vrk. Weapons are banned on Beck's World but the two Vargr have cyber-enhanced physiques and implanted weapons. The fourth member of Venshar's crew is a woman called Eshanta, a demolitions expert and pilot of the ship's boat.

While in town, Venshar and his bodyguards visit the gang and make a deal with them, while Eshanta plants a demolition charge in the rocky cliffs above the university outpost. The four meet up at the starport and then enter their ship's boat. The small craft then takes off and vanishes into the smoky sky. Initially, it is on a course bound for the *White City* in orbit but 10 minutes after taking off, it changes course to head for the dig site in the north.

After landing at the dig site, the crew disembark and enter the caves. The ship's boat returns to the *White City* under remote control.

Playing Bay Venshar: See *Cutting a Deal,* on page 84, if the Travellers talk to Venshar.

LANDSLIDE!

Thirty minutes after the ship's boat departs, Eshanta's hidden demolition charge explodes, triggering a landslide. Thousands of tons of rock slide down the slope, smashing through the flimsy habitation domes of the university compound and engulfing the dome. The landslide is aimed at the archaeologist's buildings but it also hits several other buildings in Beck's Town.

The cataclysmic rumble of the landslide is audible everywhere in town. The landslide throws up a thick cloud of black dust, cutting visibility to less than two metres.

If the Travellers were unlucky enough to be in or near the university compound, they are caught in the landslide. Travellers outside must make Difficult (10+) DEX checks and suffer 1D points of damage for every point of Effect below 0. For Travellers inside a building, roll 1D. On a 1–3, the building survives but the Travellers are buried alive; on a 4–6, the building collapses and the Travellers take that many dice of damage.

The following events happen in the chaotic minutes after the landslide. If present, the Travellers may intercede as they wish.

- **Kenton Wyld is the only survivor:** The research lab was crushed by the landslide and the technician who was working on the roof swept away and crushed. Wyld is initially trapped within the main habitat dome. He tries shouting for help.
- **Scavenging and Looting:** Half of Beck's Town arrives at the disaster site. Some of them are there to search the rubble for victims but most concentrate on looting the wreckage of the university compound.
- **Jocan Panics:** The Imperial consul, Jocan, is woken from a drunken stupor by the sound of the landslide. Convinced that the Zhodani are attacking, he runs out into the dust cloud looking for the Travellers. When he finds them, he demands that they take him to Feri immediately, so he can send word of the invasion! If the Travellers can calm Jocan down and convince him that Beck's World is not under attack by psionic hostiles, they can use the authority of the Imperial consul to take command of the rescue effort.
- **The gang arrives:** Soon after the landslide, Uro Phell and half a dozen other gang members arrive. They are armed with shotguns and stunners, and threaten the crowd until it disperses. They search the rubble of the university compound for Ancients artefacts. Phell finds Jocan and informs him that the landslide wiped out everyone at the university compound and suggests he return to the consulate in case there are secondary tremors.
- **No survivors:** Part of the deal that the gang struck with Venshar is that there would be no survivors to tie the relic dealer to any incidents on Beck's World. Therefore, if the gang finds survivors in the rubble, such as Kenton Wyld, they will hide the discovery from onlookers and quietly bludgeon the unfortunate victim to death, making it look like he was killed in the landslide. If any Travellers were caught in the rubble, they will meet the same fate.

SCAVENGER

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	5	Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 0, Stealth 1
DEX	6	EDU	4	
END	4	SOC	2	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Club (2D)

GANG MEMBER

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	5	Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 1
DEX	6	EDU	4	
END	7	SOC	2	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Slug Rifle (3D) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+5)

AFTERMATH

The most likely result is that the Travellers get involved in the rescue effort, find Wyld and then have to escape the gang. The gang are not ready to provoke conflict in full view of the Imperial consul but if Jocan is not present, and there are no other witnesses, Uro Phell or another gang member might risk taking a shot at a troublesome Traveller.

A successful Explosives or Science (planetology) check confirms the landslide was artificially triggered, probably with a standard mining charge.

Searching the debris of the university compound lets the Travellers find a map showing the location of the dig site. Alternatively, if the Travellers successfully rescued Kenton Wyld, he can guide them there. Kenton can also be used as a replacement Traveller.

INTO THE CAVES

Read the following out loud to the Travellers:

The surface of Beck's World is composed of endless kilometres of broken black rock. At first, it is interesting to look out at the bizarre landscape and marvel at the twisted dragons and spiked monsters and congealed stone but eventually all the shapes blur. You fly through a rainstorm of black sooty water that stains the hull of your ship an inky grey.

After more than an hour's flight, you descend towards the dig site. Idly, you wonder how they found this cave, as it looks no different to any of 1,000 other openings you have flown over.

Outside the cave mouth, you see a flattish rock that has obviously been used as a landing pad. There are supply crates and pup tents in the shelter of a rocky overhang. The cave mouth yawns wide like the maw of some tremendous beast.

There is no one at this cave entrance; all the researchers are inside the cave. At the mouth of the main cave are two bright yellow poles topped with an orange box of electronics. These are comm relays, used to carry communications into the caves. The Travellers can tap into the network easily but there is no communication traffic. The crates contain basic survival equipment – water and food supplies, breather masks, headlamps, helmets, heated suits, ropes, crampons, climbing gear and handheld seismic sensors.

A successful Recon check shows that another craft recently landed here – from the shape of the tracks, it was probably a large flyer, maybe a ship's boat. A Very Difficult (12+) Recon check (1D minutes, INT) picks up four sets of prints leading from the landing site into the cave. Two of the prints are definitely Vargr, the others are human.

NATURAL HAZARDS

The cave network is mostly unexplored and extremely dangerous. The upper section consists mainly of hollow lava tubes; the Travellers can walk along these low-ceilinged tubes, although they must crawl in some parts. The route through the cave network is marked with fluorescent paint but in places the route is unclear.

There are a few natural hazards in the upper caves. Keep rolling on the Natural Hazards table, adding DM+1 each time after the first, until the Travellers reach the base camp.

BASE CAMP

Read the following to the Travellers:

This large cavern is illuminated by a glowing sphere attached to the high ceiling. There are half a dozen tents here, as well as more supply crates and scientific equipment – and everything, even the globe in the ceiling, is splattered with blood. People died here; laser-burns in the rock walls and torn hunks of human flesh bear testament to the carnage.

Natural Hazards

1D	Encounter
1	**No Encounter:** Just lots of tunnels.
2	**Difficult Climb:** Each Traveller must make an Average (8+) DEX check (1D minutes) or fall, suffering 2D damage.
3	**Confusing Tunnels:** A Routine (6+) Navigation check is needed to find the correct route. If this check is failed, the Travellers lose any accumulated DM to rolls on this table.
4	**Treacherous Floor:** The floor beneath a randomly chosen Traveller collapses; they must make a Difficult (10+) DEX check or suffer 2D damage.
5	**Rockfall:** The ceiling collapses. All Travellers suffer 2D damage.
6	**Relic:** One of the Travellers finds a fragment of metal or ceramic bearing Ancients glyphs. This relic is worth 1Dx1DxCr500 if sold on the black market.
7	**Tight Squeeze:** The tunnel becomes extremely narrow. Travellers in armour must remove it in order to get through. Unarmoured Travellers must make an Average (8+) DEX check to wriggle through; failure inflicts 1D damage. If a Traveller cannot make it however, they must find another route.
8	**Evidence of Wrongdoing:** Roll 1D. The Travellers find either the corpse of one of the researchers from the base camp (on 1–4) or an explosive charge (on 5–6). The charge is set to be detonated by remote control and can be disarmed with a Difficult (10+) Explosives check (1D rounds, INT).
9	**Base Camp:** The Travellers have found the base camp of the archaeologists.

A search of the camp reveals at least two bodies, possibly three. They were killed with laser fire but then torn apart by something with claws and fangs – Venshar's Vargr bodyguards. The camp has been looted by Venshar's team.

WORD FROM BELOW

There are communications relays at either side of the camp; those on the side closest to the surface have been blasted with lasers and disabled, cutting anyone deeper in the cave off from the surface. While the Travellers are searching the camp, they receive a message via their comms. It is Dr. Volsang.

'This is Volsang calling base camp... can you hear me? We're showing a functional relay network, so you should be receiving this... hello?

'Bah. Stiv, they're not receiving. The whole grid must be screwy.'

If the Travellers respond to Dr. Volsang, she asks them to identify themselves. She tells the Travellers that she is in the primary dig site, at the bottom of the Big Stairs. Just follow the markers and they will find her – and then the signal goes dead, as Venshar disables another comm relay.

The chase is on.

THE BIG STAIR

The Big Stair is only a short distance from the base camp.

It is a cliff that is more than a kilometre in height, a sheer drop into the yawning darkness.

If a Traveller is brave enough to look over the edge, they see four lights in the darkness, far below. These are the lights of Venshar and his team. If the Travellers want to try having a vertical firefight at a range of 500 metres, let them – the Vargr are only too happy to return fire.

Every 100 metres or so down the cliff, there is a convenient ledge. The archaeologists theorised that a flying creature like a Droyne could descend the Big Stair by gliding from ledge-to-ledge. The Stair is a natural chasm, a discontinuity between two continental plates but it has been shaped by the Ancients.

There are three comm relays on the Big Stair – one at the top, one halfway down and one at the bottom. All three are required to relay a message from the end of the Stair to base camp.

If the Travellers have grav belts or other flying devices, they can try flying down the shaft. This makes them excellent targets for Venshar's thugs, unless the Travellers want to risk flying blind by turning off their lamps. Flying also means they are very vulnerable to gravity bubbles.

Alternatively, the Travellers can just climb down the Stair using ropes. The archaeologists have already hammered pitons and guide ropes into the rock, so abseiling down from ledge-to-ledge is not hard. However, if the Travellers want to move quickly, the Referee should call for DEX checks while climbing.

Climbing the Big Stair: Routine (6+) DEX check (1Dx5 minutes per ledge).

If the Travellers want to avoid being spotted by Venshar, then they have to turn off their headlamps and descend the stairs in complete darkness and silence. This makes the check Difficult (10+).

UNNATURAL HAZARDS

There are two hazards in the Big Stair and the caves below, both of Ancients origin. The Travellers will run into them as they descend. They are both defence mechanisms dating back to the time of the Final Wars that were accidentally reactivated by the archaeologists.

Gravity Bubbles: Invisible bubbles of warped gravity shoot up the shaft at random intervals. If a climber is caught in a gravity bubble, they must make a STR check or be knocked off the wall by a sudden burst of energy. Assuming the Traveller has a secure safety rope, they will not fall to their death at the bottom of the shaft but will take 1D damage and become temporarily disorientated.

Gravity bubbles are more dangerous to a Traveller using any sort of flying device, such as a grav belt. The gravity bubble scrambles the device's internal systems, so the wearer falls like a rock. The gravity bubbles are designed to prevent flying drones from entering the caves below.

Panic Fields: This is a subtle psionic effect that permeates the Big Stair and the caverns below. The effect is more pronounced as one travels deeper into the caves. If a Traveller makes a hostile action, such as firing a weapon or swinging a sword, they feel unusually paranoid and panicky. Keep track of the number of attacks made by each Traveller; once a Traveller's total equals their INT, the panic field takes hold. A Traveller gripped by the panic field suffers

DM-2 to all attack rolls and checks, as they hallucinate shadowy enemies closing in from all sides. Deliberately dropping all weapons removes the panic effect.

THE ANCIENT SHELTER

At the bottom of the Big Stair is a warren of smaller caverns and structures, worming into the rock around the central shaft. Pyramidal temples and strange ovoid buildings protrude from the sides of the shaft, hanging there like the nests of improbable stone-eating wasps. In the last days of the Final Wars, hundreds of Ancients took refuge here.

There are thousands of hiding places but the only way out is up the Big Stair.

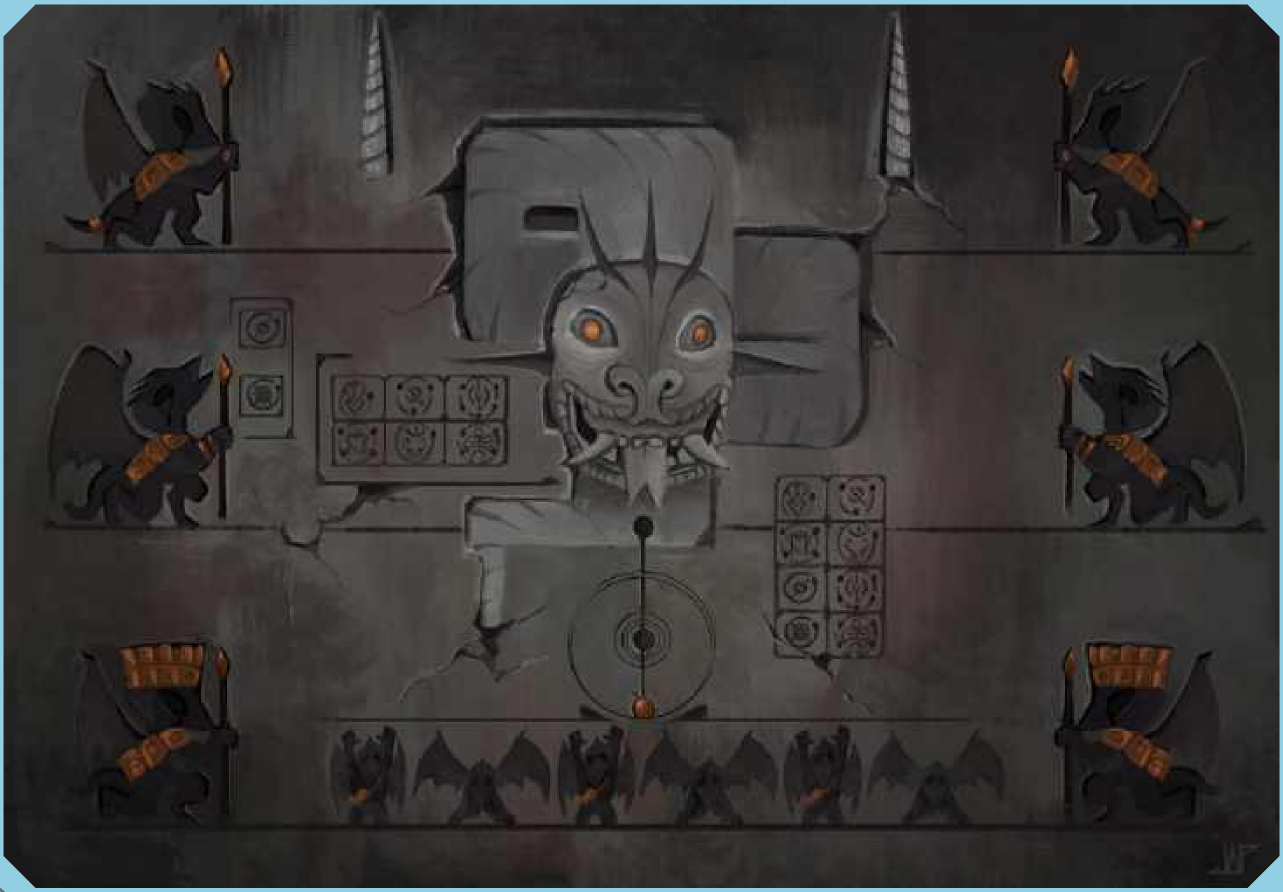
DR. VOLSANG, I PRESUME?

It is obvious that searching the shelter for Dr. Volsang and the other survivors would take much too long. Therefore, Bay Venshar has a more direct method. He and his bodyguards take up positions at the bottom of the shaft. If the Travellers have made their presence known, then Venshar and his team take cover; otherwise, they just stand in the open bowl-shaped depression at the end of the Big Stair.

Venshar uses a megaphone to shout a message to Dr. Volsang. His reedy voice echoes around the shaft.

PRESCIENCE

If the Travellers explore the Ancients shelter at the base of the Big Stair, one of the first chambers they enter contains a piece of Ancients artwork. It is an oddly stylised pictogram of Beck’s World, resembling Aztec art. Six Droyne hide in a cavern at the heart of the world, their wings wrapped around their heads in terror. Hanging above the world is a space monster, a wingless worm in the shape of the Droyne glyph for ‘seven’.



'DOCTOR VOLSANG! I AM BAY VENSHAR AND I AM A GREAT ADMIRER OF YOUR WORK. I WANT YOUR ANCIENTS DETECTOR TECHNOLOGY AND I WANT IT NOW. IF YOU COME OUT NOW, I'LL SPARE THE REST OF YOUR TEAM. OTHERWISE... THIS PLACE WILL BE YOUR GRAVE, DR. VOLSANG.'

Venshar is not bluffing; he has planted more explosive charges at the top of the shaft to bring the whole place crashing down. Once he acquires Volsang's 'Ancients detector', he intends to loot and bury the university dig.

Volsang and Stiv: The two surviving members of the archaeological expedition are hiding in one of the Ancients tunnels. They have no idea what is going on – they just returned from a long excursion into a previously unexplored tunnel to find the base camp destroyed and four strangers blocking the only way out of the caves. Their next action depends on what the Travellers do.

If the Travellers manage to climb down the Big Stair without being spotted by Venshar, then Volsang sneaks out of her hiding place and makes contact with them. She does not know who they are but they have to be more friendly than the Vargr mercenaries and the crazy kid.

If the Travellers attack Venshar, then Volsang hides in the tunnels until the firefight is over.

Juni Volsang: Volsang is a high-flying academic in the University of Regina. She was the protégé of Professor Ujinka and her discovery of a method to detect Ancients sites using G-band emissions will confirm her reputation as one of the great experts in the Spinward Marches. She is paranoid about her research being stolen, so maintains only a single copy of her work on her computer (she has a backup copy in a wafer jack in her skull).

CUTTING A DEAL

Bay Venshar is a murderer and a thief but he did not get to be 200 years old without knowing when to negotiate. If the Travellers start waving guns around and his Vargr mercenaries cannot eliminate the danger instantly, Venshar will offer to cut a deal with the Travellers. He assumes they too are dealers in black-market Ancients relics and guesses they are probably working for Ven Yosha. No doubt they murdered Professor Ujinka. He can respect professional work like that.

JUNI VOLSANG

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	40

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	10	Electronics (comms) 1, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (remote ops) 1, Electronics (sensors) 3, Engineer (power) 1, Explosives 0, Gun Combat 0, Investigate 1, Life Sciences 0, Medic 0, Navigation 1, Recon 0, Science (archaeology) 3, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	8	EDU	10	
END	6	SOC	8	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Laser Pistol (3D, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+12)

Playing Volsang:

- You're not sure what's going on here but you're quick on the uptake. Your first priority is finding out what happened to your team and getting out alive.
- You're very protective of your team; these grad students are more than your colleagues, they're your friends.
- You despise thieves; the Ancients are too important to be treated as historical curiosities.
- Speak in bullet points; outline your argument logically, never waste words.

VARGR MERCENARIES

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	5	Electronics 0, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Melee (natural) 2, Persuade 1, Recon 1, Tactics (ground) 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	EDU	4	
END	9	SOC	3	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Laser Rifle (5D, Zero-G) **Armour:** Combat Armour (+13)

BAY VENSHAR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	200

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	9	Admin 1, Advocate 1, Broker 2, Deception 2, Electronics (comms) 1, Gambler 1, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Investigate 1, Persuade 2.
DEX	10	EDU	8	
END	5	SOC	7	
EQUIPMENT		**Weapons:** Laser Pistol (3D+3, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+12)		

Playing Venshar:

- Remember to speak in a high-pitched, childish voice. He is physically an adolescent.
- Murder and suffering are your stock in trade; Venshar is unencumbered by a conscience.
- Try to sound reasonable, even when talking about how you wiped out the entire university team just to hide your tracks.
- Initially, when talking about the Ancients, do so with a fanatical, religious tone in your voice as if discussing the Gods. If the Travellers show no signs of being religious lunatics, then switch to your genuine attitude of pure greed.

Venshar wants to be the only one who possesses Volsang's Ancients detector but if he has to share his toys, so be it. His main bargaining tool is the ring of explosive charges that he can use to collapse the shaft but will use these only as a last resort. He would prefer a compromise, where he gets access to the Travellers' knowledge of the Ancients in exchange for sharing Volsang's technology.

SEISMIC ACTIVITY

There is one major flaw in Venshar's scheme – to send the remote-detonation command to the bombs, he needs to use the comm relay network set up by the archaeologists. If the Travellers disable any of the comm relays, the bombs cannot be remotely detonated. This can give the Travellers an edge against Venshar.

If the bombs are detonated, then the gravity bubbles in the shaft give the Travellers time to get to cover. A Traveller caught in the collapsing shaft is killed by thousands of tons of falling rock. The explosion collapses the Big Stair and seals the Ancients shelter from the surface. Secondary explosions collapse the cave containing the base camp.

GETTING OUT ALIVE

There are several ways that the Travellers can escape the caves with Volsang's technology:

- The most direct method is eliminating Venshar in a firefight and rescuing Dr. Volsang. They can then either steal her technology or convince her to aid them.
- They can cut a deal with Venshar, trading a peaceful resolution and their knowledge of the Ancients for Volsang's technology. Venshar can even become a recurring character in later adventures.
- They can force Venshar to flee by disabling his bombs and convincing him that Volsang's technology is not worth his life.
- If the Travellers are buried alive, then Volsang can find another way out through the caves.
- If Volsang is killed, then the Travellers may still be able to retrieve her technology, either from her personal computer or the wafer jack in her skull.

BOUGHENE

Located on the fringes of the subsector, Boughene is a lightly inhabited system, home to a single Scout Service base and a few other space stations orbiting the mainworld. It sees little traffic, apart from scouts and ships on their way to the naval outpost at Pixie.

THE SCOUT BASE

As soon as the Travellers arrive in the system, they will be detected by the scout base and challenged. If they came straight here from Alell, then they may have arrived ahead of their arrest warrant; if they are here after Week Three, then the *Alahir* is waiting for them in this system. While most of the ships at the scout base are standard scouts, there are larger and better-armed vessels present.

It is 400 million kilometres from the scout base at Boughene to Komesh, giving the Travellers two or three days of searching before they are intercepted by Imperial forces.

KOMESH

The largest gas giant in the Boughene system is named Komesh, a forbidding world of thick ammonia clouds and swirling storms. According to Vlen Backett's records, a merchant found an Ancients statue on a metal-rich asteroid orbiting Komesh and also detected distortions in the G-band. This evidence suggests there is an Ancients base somewhere near Komesh.

Komesh is orbited by a dozen large moons and hundreds of smaller objects, all of which have been exhaustively classified by bored scouts. The deeper reaches of the planet's atmosphere, however, have never been plumbed. If the Ancients base still exists in the system, the only place it could be is deep within the gas giant.

Only a fool would dive into Komesh's gravity well. The atmosphere is 89% hydrogen and 10% helium; the remainder is a mix of water vapour, methane and ammonia. There are many layers of clouds, concentrated around an altitude of 36,000 kilometres. At the upper limit of this band, the clouds are water and ice; deeper into the planet's atmosphere, the clouds are condensed ammonia and absorb almost all light.

Most ships scooping fuel from a gas giant rarely venture below the pressure level of 0.5 atmospheres (an altitude of 36,500 kilometres on Komesh). Diving below this level is extremely hazardous, as the ship risks being caught in the gravity well; the amount of thrust needed to manoeuvre increases significantly. A skilled pilot can dive into the atmosphere and fly back out if their ship has sufficient momentum and a talented engineer can wring more thrust out of a grav plate in an emergency but it is still extremely dangerous.

Deep in the atmosphere, the temperature also rises quickly. Pressure, heat, the raging windstorms and ammonia sleet can push even the toughest ship to the breaking point.

SENSOR SWEEP

A series of successful Average (8+) Electronics (sensors) checks are required to locate the Ancients base. The 'base' is actually a ship moving through the planet's atmosphere, under the cloud banks, so three successful checks in a row are needed to locate it. The DM for the checks depends on how deep the Travellers dive into the atmosphere.

The deeper the Travellers dive, the more damage their ship endures and the greater the negative DM of the Average (8+) Pilot check to maintain control. Other Travellers can aid both the Electronics (sensors) and Pilot checks using a task chain:

Science (planetology) → Electronics (computers) → Electronics (sensors)
Engineer (power) → Engineer (m-drive) → Pilot

If the Electronics (sensors) check is failed, the Travellers lose their bearing on the G-band distortions and must start again.

If the Pilot check is failed, the ship takes the amount of damage listed on the Komesh Altitude table *and* suffers DM-2 to subsequent Pilot checks. This DM persists until the ship returns to orbit. At deeper levels of the atmosphere, a ship will take the lesser amount of listed damage regardless of the Pilot check result.

INTO THE MAELSTROM

If the Travellers make three successful Electronics (sensors) checks in a row, they detect an object at approximately 35,500 kilometres. It is moving in an unpredictable pattern, either under its own power or being blown by the shifting winds. Either way, it is obviously artificial and could be a floating platform or starship.

If it is an Ancients artefact, then they could use it as a bargaining chip and escape the arrest warrant. The only way onwards is downwards...

Komesh Altitude

Altitude	Pressure	Sensor check DM	Pilot check DM	Damage
38,000km	Vacuum	-10	+2	—
37,000km	Trace	-8	0	—
36,000km	1 atmosphere	-6	-2	0/2D
35,000km	300 atmospheres	-4	-4	2D/6D
34,000km	10,000+ atmospheres	-2	-8	6D/destroyed

If the Travellers have access to Dr. Volsang's sensor enhancements, they grant DM+6 to Electronics (sensors) checks, making the search much easier.

DESCENT

After fighting their way through a sudden hydrogen squall, the Travellers dock with the alien ship. Exploring the outer sections of the ship, they find ancient starmaps and other clues relating to the Ancients who built the ship. They must also fend off attacks from the native fauna of the gas giant.

The Travellers find their way into the internal compartments of the ship, which consist of a series of capsules linked by teleportation portals. Much of the ship was damaged hundreds of thousands of years ago, so they have to work out a safe way to navigate the teleportation grid and reach the ship's bridge.

On the bridge, they reawaken the ship's artificial intelligence. The ship rises out of Komesh's gravity well, where it is challenged by the *Alahir*, the Imperial Intelligence ship that has chased the Travellers across the subsector. Moments later, something far more dangerous arrives in the system...

THE ANCIENT SHIP

300,000 years ago, during the wars of the Ancients, this ship was dispatched by Grandfather to retrieve one of his experiments – a human colony, on the world now known as Bilke (hex 0110 in the Trojan Reach) – before it was wiped out by his rampaging offspring. During its return, the ship was attacked by an enemy vessel and suffered severe damage. The damage to the hull and other physical systems was considerable but its self-repair systems could eventually heal these wounds by siphoning the required matter from the gas giant and assembling new components. The worst damage, however, was inflicted on the ship's mind. It was struck by an information-devouring viral weapon, a vicious attack that injured the ship's sentience directly. The virus worked by consuming the ship's intellect and using its own processing power against the ship – the more of the ship's mind that it ate, the smarter the virus became.

Confused and paralysed, the shattered mind of the ship attempted to do its best for its cargo. The human and Droyne passengers were removed from suspended animation and the ship created an ecosystem on its upper hull while it reconfigured its lower decks to optimise its self-repair. It also shut down its own computing systems, to slow the advance of the virus while it searched for a way to defeat the invading program.

Its limited runtime has been stretched for millennia. The ship's computer awakens only for an instant every few thousand years, otherwise sleeping for aeons, punctuated by brief spasms of awareness like beads strung on an infinitely long cord. Each period of wakefulness brings with it an opportunity to continue self-repair and observation but soon the virus also awakens. To preserve itself, the ship must shut down as soon as the virus is active.

The passengers died out 299,500 years ago. Their civilisation was quite successful, given their utter lack of resources or living space. They established agriculture to make up for the ship's declining ability to provide for them and more than a dozen generations lived and died on board before the last human perished. The ship experimented with nurturing bacteria along an evolutionary path that would eventually produce sentient lifeforms capable of aiding in repairs but abandoned this project some 250,000 years ago; the upper deck was sterilised with a burst of radiation.

From the ship's perspective, the Final Wars are a recent memory. Its last period of wakefulness was 2,000 years ago, when it realised that its struggle against the invading virus was futile and that it would never be able to overcome the enemy without outside aid. It dispatched one of its pod-capsules to look for Grandfather. Some of the contents of this pod were found by a merchant ship in the Boughene asteroid belt in 703.

ANGELS AND DEMONS

There are two artificial intelligences operating on board the Ancients ship – the ship's original AI and the hostile information-warfare virus that has been attacking for 300 millennia. Initially, both AIs are unaware of the presence of the Travellers, as the computers are shut down.

Once the Travellers reach the lower decks of the ship, the AIs are automatically awoken. The ship's AI immediately recognises the Travellers as potentially useful pawns – if it brings them to the bridge, it can create a subroutine that obeys their commands without volition of its own. As this subroutine cannot act without external authorisation, it cannot be easily subverted by the virus. However, the subroutine's list of options will be so curtailed so as to ensure the Travellers do what the ship wants them to do.

The virus, the dark shadow of the ship's mind, also recognises the Travellers as a threat to it. It will attempt to stop them from getting to the bridge.

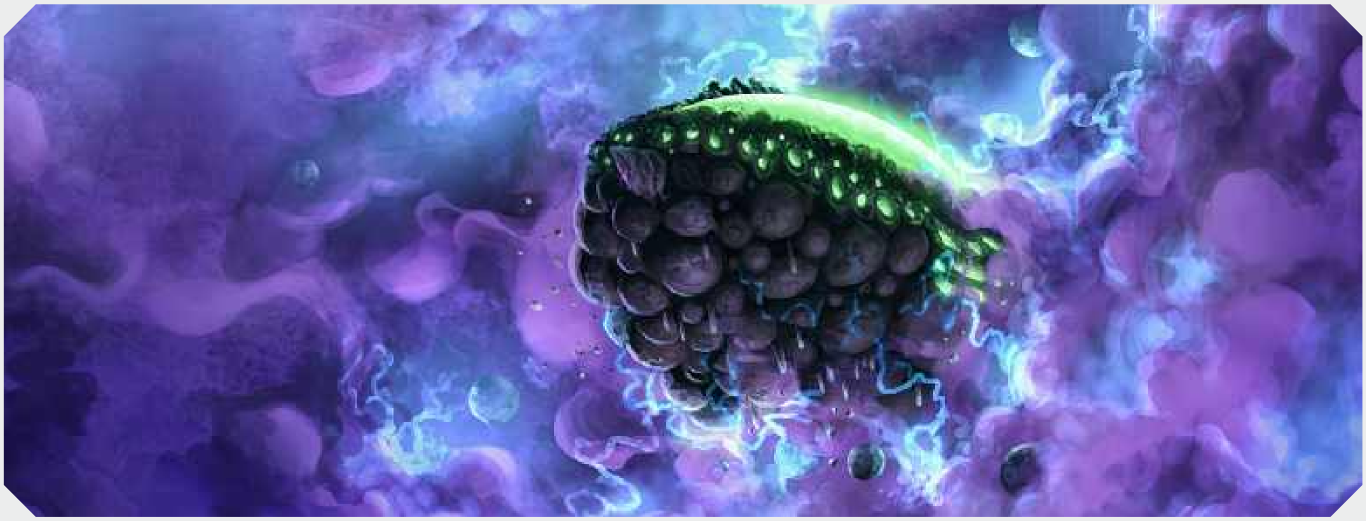
In the game, the effects of these two AIs appear as strange events that the Referee should throw in as the Travellers explore the ship. The ship's AI tries to guide them towards the bridge; the hostile virus tries to eliminate them. If the Travellers are lost, have the friendly AI aid them; if they are getting too close to the bridge, then the virus can throw a challenge or two in their path.

Ship's AI Actions

- Activating a teleportal
- Opening an iris hatch
- Providing a needed teleporter address
- Dispatching a servitor robot to help the Travellers
- Sending subliminal messages to a Traveller who has found one of the Ancients translators

Virus Actions

- Scrambling a teleportal address so the Travellers end up teleported to a random direction
- Attacking the Travellers with interconnectors that break into a capsule and attack
- Detaching a capsule from the ship and letting it drop into the gas giant (as with Capsule 51)
- Dispatching a servitor robot to murder the Travellers
- Adjusting environmental conditions to lethal settings
- Sending subliminal messages to confuse or threaten the Travellers



THE MAELSTROM

The wrecked Ancients ship is floating at an altitude of approximately 35,500 kilometres. That is within the operating range for the Travellers' ship but with a pressure in excess of 100 atmospheres, coupled with squalls of hydrogen and high winds it is very risky to fly down that far into a gas giant. The Ancients ship is moving semi-randomly – most of the time, driven by the winds, but it sometimes activates its manoeuvring thrusters to fly against the wind or move to a different altitude.

NAVIGATING THE GAS GIANT

- To fly to the wrecked ship, the Travellers need to make a series of Difficult (10+) Pilot checks.
- Engineer (power) and Engineer (m-drive) can be used as a task chain to provide modifiers to the Pilot check.
- The Travellers need to accumulate a total Effect of 6+2D to get close to the wreck.
- Each time the check is failed, the Travellers' ship takes damage, starting at 2D damage.
- The DM increases by -2 for each failed check and the damage increases by 1D.
- If the negative DM is too high, the Travellers can abandon the attempt and return to a safe altitude. This resets both the DM and damage from high pressure.

If the Travellers wait for the Ancients ship to come closer to the surface, then re-roll the needed total Effect every six hours. Waiting for the optimum time means hanging in orbit above Komesh and risking detection by the scout base at the mainworld. Optionally, have the *Alahir* show up to force the Travellers to brave the gas giant.

HYDROGEN SQUALL

When the Travellers reach the requisite Effect, they are nearly at the Ancients ship. It is still hidden by clouds of hydrogen and ammonia sleet but G-band distortions are growing more pronounced and at this range even conventional sensors can pick up the presence of thermal and magnetic anomalies. The Travellers glimpse fragments of the wrecked ship through the pinkish-purple clouds. This far from Komesh's primary star, there is little daylight so most of the illumination comes from the *Star Hunter*'s own running lights and the crackling of 1,000-kilometre lightning bolts deeper in the atmosphere.

As the Travellers get closer, call for a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (sensors) check (INT). If successful, the Travellers detect small objects, possibly organic creatures, flitting around the wreck. If the check was passed with Effect 2+, they are able to get a visual image of one of the creatures – a gas-bag trailing tentacles behind it. A successful Science (xenobiology) check lets the Travellers guess that the creature is native to the gas giant and not a survivor from the wrecked ship. The Travellers will not be alone when they board the wreck.

Suddenly, a hydrogen squall hits the Travellers' ship. The helmsman must make a Very Difficult (12+) Pilot check (DEX) to ride out the squall. If the check is successful, the Travellers can keep control of the *Star Hunter* as it flies through the squall. If the check is failed, the ship takes another 2D damage; even if it is still intact, the pilot has lost control of the ship. The *Star Hunter* spins end over end through the gas giant before crashing into the Ancients ship. See *Crashing*, on page 91.

THE WRECK

The *Star Hunter* breaks through the squall clouds and into an area of clear sky, giving the Travellers their first clear view of the Ancients wreck.

It is the strangest ship imaginable. It looks more like a living creature or maybe an abstract sculpture inspired by some alien lifeform, than an actual ship. There are no straight lines or symmetries, just curves and spirals. Judging size and distance is difficult but instruments show the vessel masses more than 5,000 tons.

The upper half of the ship is a mostly smooth expanse of greenish metal, pock-marked with the occasional strange barnacle-like structure or growth. As the Travellers fly closer, they see geometric shapes on the hull, reddish squares and rectangles with fuzzy edges. A shimmering, semi-transparent energy field wraps around the upper section.

Towards the prow of the ship, there is a twisted spire like a narwhal's horn mixed with the organic complexity of a banyan grove. The gas clouds part ahead of this spire, suggesting that it is projecting a magnetic field of some sort. Closer examination of the gas clouds suggests that the gas is being sucked into one of the pods in the lower section.

The lower section of the hull is a tangle of silvery cords, wrapped around dozens of greenish-grey spheres. These spheres range in size from three to fifty metres in diameter. Some show clear signs of battle damage; there are blackened scars along the hull, shattered hollow spheres and twisted strands of the greenish hull metal trailing behind the wreck. Every few seconds, there is a stuttering discharge of

energy, as the energy field wrapped around the upper hull extends to the lower section. The extended field lasts only a fraction of a second before snapping back to its original configuration.

There are no discernible fuel tanks, no thruster plates and no sign of a jump grid inlaid in the hull.

If the Travellers are in control of their vessel at this point, they can pause to take some close-range sensors scans of the Ancients ship. Their ship takes another 2D damage if they hold station long enough to gather sensor data. The sensor operator can make an Electronics (sensors) check to gather data; this then starts a task chain with the skills listed below. The same Electronics (sensors) check is used for each of the Science checks. If a check is passed, the Travellers get the information noted for it.

- **Science (physics):** The energy field surrounding the upper half of the hull seems to be a protective shield of some sort, keeping the atmosphere of the gas giant at bay.
- **Science (chemistry):** Analysing the damaged sections of the hull suggests it is not made out of any known metal but a complex blend of fibrous organic materials, carbon, titanium and some sort of strange quark matter.
- **Science (xenology):** If there are indeed life-forms in this gas giant, the Ancients ship would be an unimaginable rich source of minerals for them. A whole ecosystem may have evolved in the thousands of years that this ship has waited here.
- **Engineer (life support) or Science (biology):** Sensor readings suggest the area within the energy shield is capable of supporting human life. Gravity, pressure, temperature and atmospheric content are all within human norms. There is a pressure difference of more than 100 atmospheres between the inside and outside of the shield but it shows no strain whatsoever.
- **Science (archaeology):** This is the single most intact Ancients artefact ever discovered – at least, as far as the Travellers know. The secrets on board that ship could be worth a staggering amount of Credits.
- **Astrogation:** The ship is correcting its own course and orbit. It is deliberately holding its position here.
- A Traveller with any ranks in Profession (farmer) or a similar skill can identify the reddish areas on the upper hull. They look just like farms.

DOCKING

If the *Star Hunter* approaches the ship under its own power, the Travellers can look for a suitable docking port. If they come close to the upper hull, then the energy shield ripples and forms an oval portal just big enough for their ship to pass through – a clear invitation for the Travellers to land on the upper deck. The *Star Hunter* can pass through the oval portal without difficulty – trying to fly through the rest of the energy shield causes their ship to bounce off, sustaining 3D damage in the process.

The gasbag lifeforms of the gas giant enter and leave the ship the same way. For these creatures, the low pressure of the upper deck is extremely dangerous – if they spend too long there, they suffer lethal decompression and may even explode. Therefore, they flit in and out of the shield, grabbing what they can in their brief dives.

Alternatively, if the Travellers search the lower section of the hull, they find a docking port in Capsule 52 (see page 106).

CRASHING

If the Travellers failed to maintain control during the hydrogen squall, then the *Star Hunter* comes tumbling across the sky and crashes straight through the energy shield. Fortunately, the ship opens up a portal just before the Travellers are splattered across the surface of the shield. As the *Star Hunter* passes through the portal, a tractor beam seizes it, slowing it down enough so its crash landing is one the Travellers can walk away from, as opposed to a lethal impact.

The ship takes another 4D damage from the crash landing. The Travellers survive thanks to the protective tractor beam, even if the ship is reduced to 0 Hull points. However, the *Star Hunter* will never fly again (and this will cause added problems for the Travellers in chapter 7, *The Death of Grandfather*).

THE FAUNA OF KOMESH

Komesh is a Jupiter-sized gas giant, more than 1,000 times larger than the Earth. Gas giants offer poor prospects for life – no solid ground, no warm seas – but in the immensity of the universe, life can find a few places to defy the odds and thrive. Most of the lifeforms on Komesh are single-celled organisms that feed on the magnetic flux between Komesh and its moons and on heavier gases and elements dredged up from deeper in the atmosphere by churning storm patterns. These lifeforms are analogous to plankton in Earth's oceans.

Where there are plankton, there are whales. The macroscale creatures of Komesh are all flyers; some float on gasbags containing pure hydrogen, which gives them a modicum of lift in the hydrogen/helium atmosphere. Others have filmy wings of incredible size to flap against the thin air and catch thermal updrafts. These creatures scoop up millions of 'plankton' each day.

There are predators, too, which feed on the larger flyers. These are sky-sharks, attacking by biting or slashing the locomotive limbs of the other creatures; they tear open gas bags and cripple limbs so their prey cannot escape.

Most Komesh natives have the ability to enter a state of protective hibernation when food is scarce – the creatures slow their metabolic rate down to a fraction of normal and sleep until they drift into a bountiful zone.

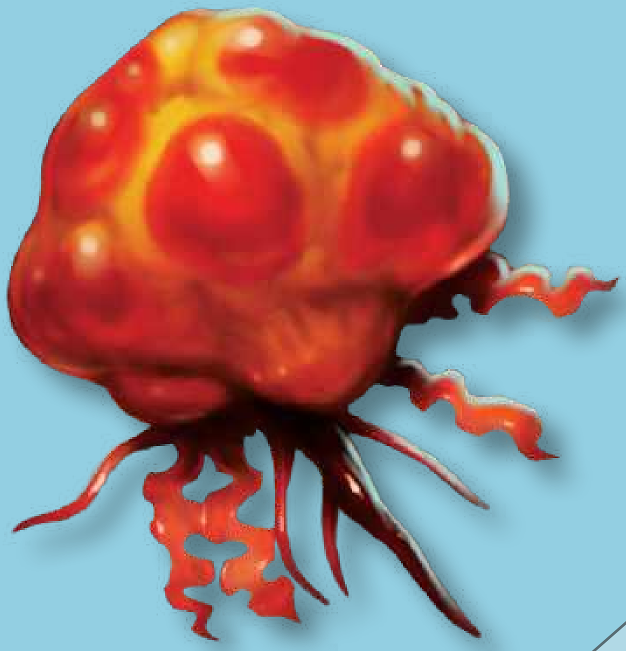
By the standards of life-rich terrestrial planets, Komesh is a barren, empty desert – but Komesh is so vast that even this paltry ecosystem contains vastly more creatures than any Earth-like world. The creatures of Komesh dwell in a world defined by pressure and heat, a world without any elements heavier than sodium. Life clusters in areas where the updrafts and storms bring up heavier, richer gases from lower in the atmosphere.

The Ancients ship acts like an artificial reef in the Komesh ecosystem. The tiny amounts of minerals shed by the ship are an incredible bounty to the Komesh natives, making it the single richest oasis of life in the whole gas giant. For the last 2,000 years, the ship has provided even more resources. When the ship launched its distress pod, it reconfigured the energy shield protecting the upper deck to allow smaller craft to pass through the barrier. The Komesh fauna have learned to trick the barrier into letting them through.

Darter

Animal	Hits	Speed
Darter	22	—
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee (natural) 3, Recon 0, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Spike (2D)*	
Traits	Flyer (very slow)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Trapper	

* After attacking, a darter must spend 3D rounds re-inflating its gas bags before it can strike again.

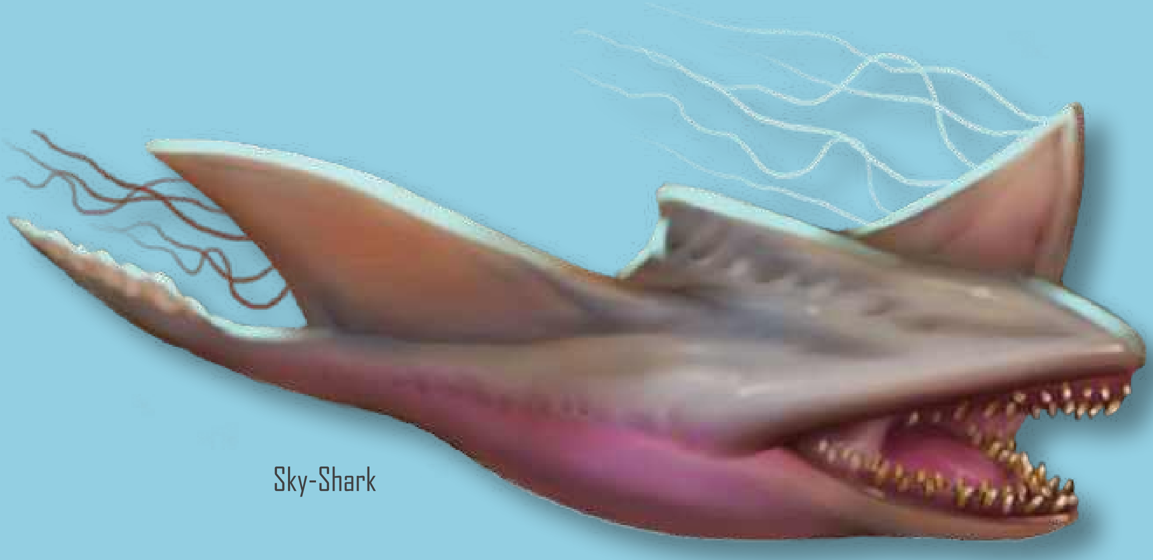


Sky-Shark

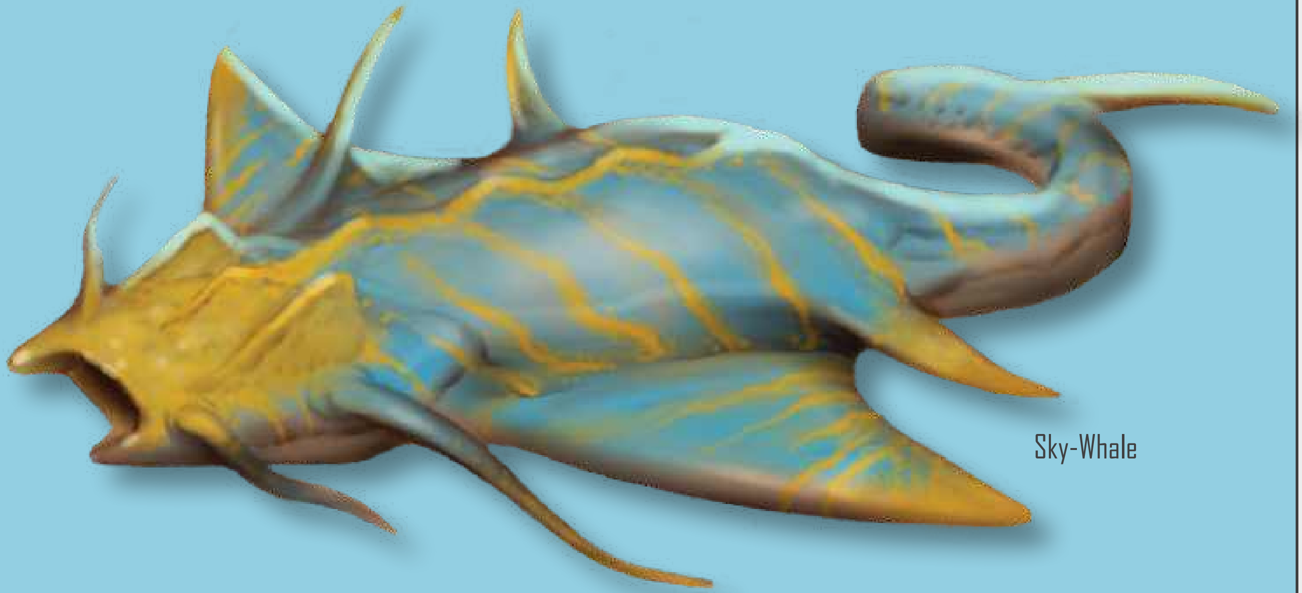
Animal	Hits	Speed
Sky-Shark	22	—
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Melee 0, Recon 0, Stealth 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Teeth (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+1), Flyer (slow)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Chaser	

Sky-Whale

Animal	Hits	Speed
Sky-Whale	35	—
Skills	Athletics (endurance) 2, Melee 0, Recon 1, Survival 1	
Attacks	Tail Sweep (2D)	
Traits	Flyer (very slow), Large (+6)	
Behaviour	Herbivore, Filter	



Sky-Shark

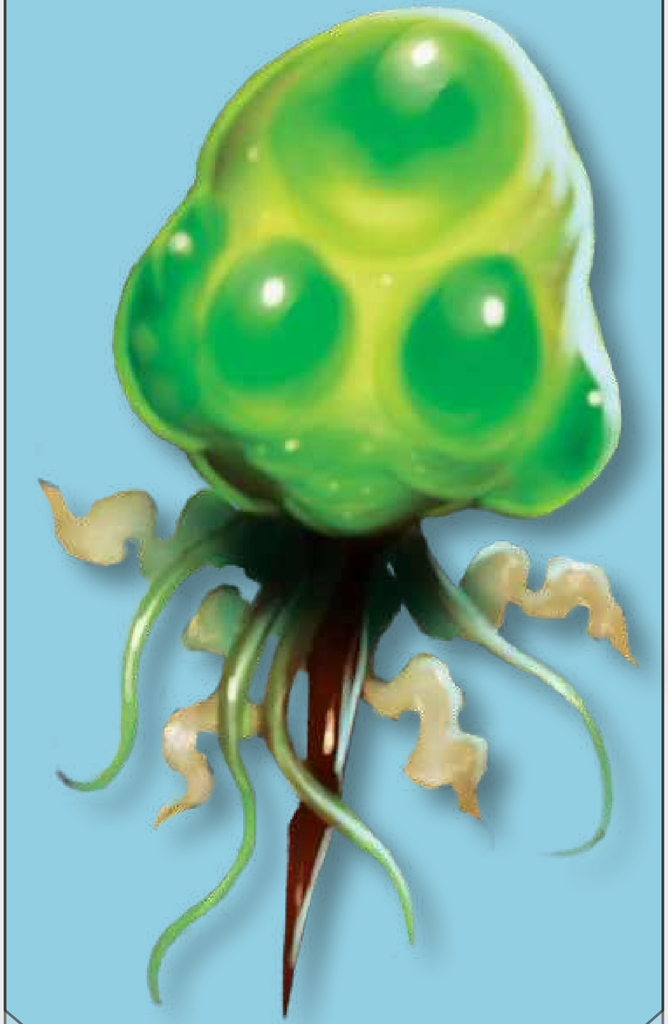


Sky-Whale

Wreck-Darter

Animal	Hits	Speed
Wreck-Darter	22	—
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Melee (natural) 3, Recon 0, Stealth 3, Survival 2	
Attacks	Spike (2D)*	
Traits	Flyer (very slow)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Trapper	

* After attacking, a wreck-darter must spend 3D rounds re-inflating its gas bags before it can strike again.



THE UPPER HULL

Emerging from their ship, the Travellers find themselves in a bizarre yet familiar environment. The upper deck is maintained in a state capable of supporting human life – the artificial gravity is around 1g, the air breathable and the shimmering energy shield above sheds light and heat similar to a warm spring day on Earth. If you closed your eyes, you could almost be on a garden world.

Contrast this with the visual impression – the ground is a woven mesh of some green substance that feels like metal but which quivers and pulses as if alive. The sky is a flickering, glowing force screen and you can see through it to the continent-sized thunderheads and gas clouds of Komesh beyond. This whole world is only a few square kilometres in extent. It is a tiny pocket world.

The Ancients ship consists of two sections – the flat upper hull, protected by the energy shield and the lower section, composed of a web of interconnector cables attached to dozens of capsules. These pods can be swapped in and out to reconfigure the ship's capabilities, while the jump drive and manoeuvre drive are built into the upper hull. Fuel and energy are both provided by teleportation portals linked to a pocket universe, although the ship's connection to its power source was damaged during the Final Wars.

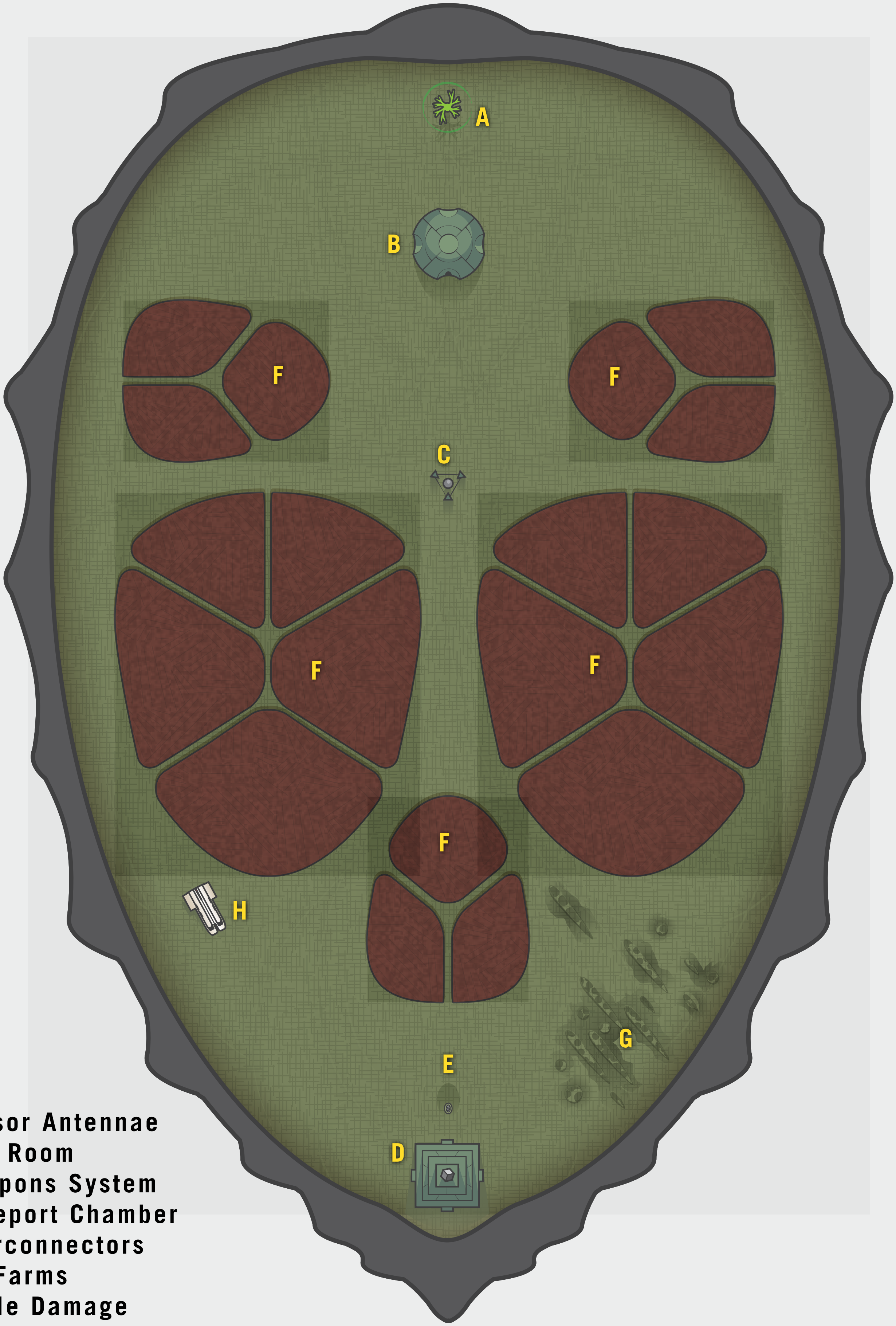
While the Travellers are exploring the upper hull, they may be attacked by the native flyers. See the *Fauna of Komesh* on page 92.

EXPLORING THE SURFACE

There are several visible structures dotted around the upper deck. The *Star Hunter* landed near the farms, while the sensor antennae and map room are located towards the forward spire. The weapon systems and self-repair units are amidships on the upper deck, while the Travellers can observe the interconnectors and find the entrance to the teleport system towards the rear.

As the Travellers explore the upper section, roll on the Upper Deck Encounters table whenever they move from one location to another.

UPPER HULL



A. Sensor Antennae
B. Map Room
C. Weapons System
D. Telleport Chamber
E. Interconnectors
F. The Farms
G. Battle Damage
H. Star Hunter

THE FARMS

Over 50% of the surface of the upper deck is covered with a layer of reddish dirt, which was obviously cultivated earth at some point in the distant past. Examining this dirt with Science (biology) reveals that it was irradiated to annihilate any microorganisms; the dirt is now completely sterile and mildly radioactive. The radiation burst, which must have been extremely intense, means that any organic material left in the soil was preserved. Digging around in the dirt reveals plant seeds and roots that the Travellers can identify as being native to Bilke. The Travellers also find some bones – the remains of a human skeleton.

A close examination of the dirt under a microscope will note that it is chemically very simple – there are very few trace minerals. The granules are oddly regular, possibly leading the Travellers to speculate that it could be synthetic. The environment on the upper deck is suitable for agriculture and it is patently obvious that whoever farmed here has been gone for thousands of years. The farmers were unlikely to be the same race who built the ship – this is primitive agriculture, using the most basic tools.

SENSOR ANTENNAE

Near the spire at the prow of the ship is another strange structure. This is one of the Ancients ship's sensor antennae. It rises from the green hull like a bizarre crystal frond and is approximately 10 metres tall. That 'approximately' comes from the fact that the frond's branches all bifurcate over and over again. The root of the front is three metres in diameter but the upper branches are so thin and tiny that they are only a few dozen nanometres thick. Invisible but impenetrable force screens protect the frond from being damaged by air currents or inquisitive Travellers.

THE MAP ROOM

The map room is a domed chamber with a single entrance. In the middle of the chamber is two-metre-tall pillar or plinth, while along the walls are a dozen square panels.

Touching a panel causes it to display a map. Experimenting with the controls at the edge of the panel allows the Travellers to scroll the map, zoom in or out, or switch the planet displayed. Another control causes features on the map to shift but the display becomes increasingly fuzzy and confused when this control is used. A Traveller with Science (planetology) will realise that the map is attempting to predict erosion and continental drift patterns – this control is designed to extrapolate the past and future geography of the target planet. Whoever designed these maps took an extremely long view.

Currently, all the panels are set to display extremely detailed maps of planets in the Boughene system. Examination of the panel corresponding to the mainworld shows no signs of human habitation. If the Travellers continue to toy with these display panels, they will eventually happen across a world they recognise and realise that these maps are some 300,000 years out of date.

Some of these maps, when the 'time' control is set to 300,000 years ago, show the locations of Ancients bases. Worlds in this subsector with Ancients bases include Yori, Beck's World, Efate, Pixie, Knorbes and Shinothy.

If the central spire is touched, the room darkens. The doorway to the outside is suddenly blocked by a grey surface (this is actually just an opaque cloud of vapour, which can be just walked through but paranoid Travellers may assume they have just been trapped). The central spire then displays a three-dimensional

Upper Deck Encounters

2D	Encounter
2	A darter flock passes through the energy shield. The Travellers have a short time to get under cover; if they remain in the open, they are attacked by 2D darters.
3	1D sky-sharks pass through the energy shield and hunt the Travellers.
4	A single darter passes through the energy shield and makes an attack on a randomly chosen Traveller.
5–8	No encounter.
9	The Travellers come across a small pool of water in a depression on the hull. If they remove any of the water, it refills. The water appears to be condensing out of the solid hull material – there are no visible pipes or nozzles.
10	The Travellers find a damaged section of hull. If they try to take a sample of the hull material, they can do so.
11	Non-functional Ancients gadget, possibly of value to a collector.
12	The Travellers find an Ancients artefact salvaged from the lower decks. See page 113.

holographic star-chart showing the Regina subsector and some surrounding stars, as any Traveller with the Astrogation skill will recognise. The Boughene system is highlighted in the centre of the display.

Unlike the display panels, which show maps from 300,000 years ago, the star map has compensated for stellar drift and shows the current configuration of the subsector. There are, however, several differences between the Ancients map and Imperial charts. Firstly, the Shinothy system has a planet in place of the current asteroid belt, lending support to those who believe that a world was shattered there during some apocalyptic war. Secondly, and more impressively, there are three star systems that do not appear on current charts but are present on the Ancients map. This trio of systems occupied hexes 2107, 2206 and 2307. The Travellers may assume these systems suffered the same fate as Shinothy; in fact, they were taken into Grandfather's pocket universe.

Examining the controls on both the spike and the display panels shows that they are faintly reminiscent of Droyne glyphs.

WEAPONS SYSTEM

The weapons system consists of a free-floating sphere of metal that seems to be made of a hair-thin coil that has been wrapped around itself millions of times, like a giant ball of twine. The sphere is two metres wide and hovers three metres off the deck. Three pillars surround the metal sphere; these pillars each have a control console. If a Traveller stands close to the sphere, they hear a low humming noise and feel the presence of a strong static electric field.

At the base of the sphere is a hexagonal white panel. This panel is icy cold to the touch and any Traveller touching it receives 2Dx10 rads.

Experimenting with the control panels reveals that one console lets the Travellers activate and deactivate the magnetic field supporting the sphere and activate some other device whose purpose is not immediately apparent; a successful Engineer (power) check lets the Travellers realise this second control seems to connect the sphere to an unknown subsystem within the ship, possibly a power distribution grid.

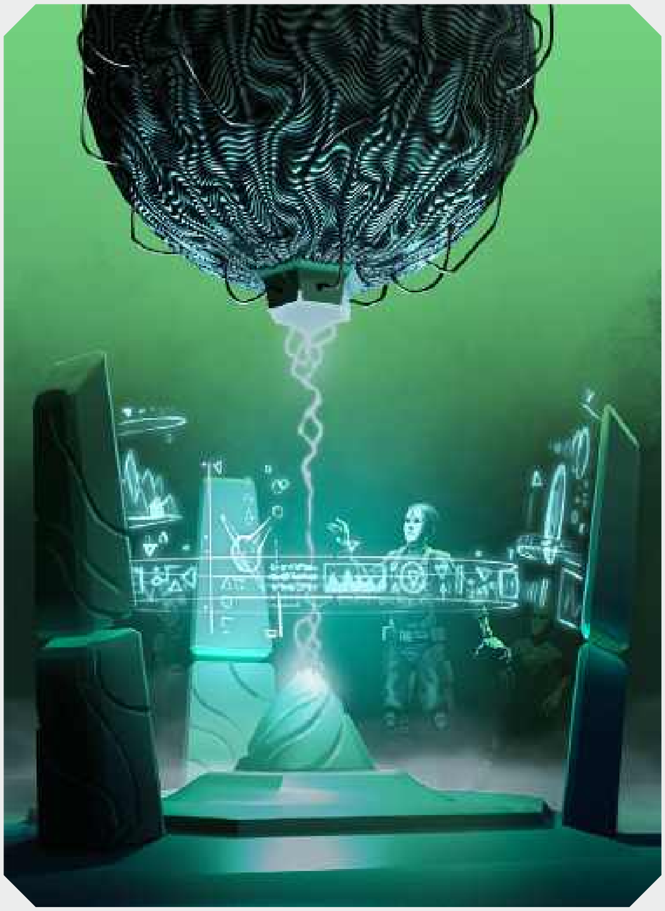
The second console lets an operator rotate the sphere in all three dimensions; there are some controls that seem to be designed to fly the sphere as a remote-control drone but they are offline.

The third console is non-functional unless the first console is used to activate the sphere and the second console to rotate the sphere so the white panel is no longer pointing directly at the ship's hull. After all, it would be a stupid design if the firing console was activated when the turret weapon was not armed or pointed towards your own ship...

Activating the third console when it is functional causes a pulse of violet energy to leap out of the deck and vanish into the sphere. The Travellers see the pulse of energy race around the coiled cable of the sphere, growing brighter and more powerful as it travels. If they do not stop the firing sequence, the weapon discharges.

The beam punches through the ship's energy shield, breaching it and causing it to start collapsing. High-pressure hydrogen gas pours into the upper deck. The Travellers immediately start drowning (suffering 1D damage every round after a number of rounds equal to their END). Their only hope is to run to one of the open compartments, such as the map room or the teleport chamber at the rear or to the *Star Hunter* if it is still intact.

The shield re-establishes itself after 3D minutes and the ship's life support systems restore a breathable oxy-nitro atmosphere within an hour after that.



If the Travellers work out how to operate this weapon, they can use it against Seven in the climax of this adventure.

AUTO-REPAIR

The Ancients ship took damage as it fled a pursuer, so visible scars of battle damage are concentrated towards the aft section. Here, the Travellers find several sections of the decking that are scorched and melted. Analysis of the battle damage suggests the use of some sort of disintegrator-based technology as the primary weapon. The scars are covered with a very thin fuzz of metallic strands.

While examining this area, the Travellers spot a small piece of metal from the *Star Hunter*'s hull that fell off during the landing. Tendrils have emerged from the Ancients ship to wrap around this piece of metal; they are feeding on it to obtain more resources to repair the rest of the ship. If the Travellers watch the auto-repair system in action, they see metallic strands grow infinitesimally to cover more of the battle damage.

Based on the rate of repair, the Travellers can work out that the major restriction on the vessel's self-repair capability is the lack of resources; the atmosphere of Komesh simply lacks many of the necessary elements needed to complete repairs.

The ship's ability to feed on external resources may also explain what happened to the remains of the farmers.

INTERCONNECTORS

At the aft section of the upper deck, the surface of the ship's hull slopes smoothly downwards into an oval depression. This depression actually tunnels through the entire upper hull down to the tangle of cables that make up the lower decks. These cables are called interconnectors. The interconnectors provide power and data to the independent pods that make up the lower deck. Interconnectors can move, expand and contract to fulfil different tasks – a hair-thin data line can swell to become a pressurised gangway or extend out to be a towing cable.

From the lip of the depression, the Travellers can see a braided, tangled mess of silvery cables. If they search through the cables, roll 2D.

On 8+, they manage to move aside some cables and find the top of a buried spherical pod. This is the roof of Capsule 46 (see page 105). The pod is marked with strange glyphs but with some experimentation, the Travellers can cause the pod hatch to open. A roughly circular section of the pod just melts away, the metal running like liquid to form an opening the Travellers can climb through. The hatch closes again once they have passed through.

On 7-, the Travellers inadvertently detach one of the interconnectors. The silver cable rises out of the tangle like a metallic serpent and swings its 'head' from side to side, looking for the proper place to reconnect. It then darts towards a connector port. Unfortunately, a randomly chosen Traveller is in the way of the cable. That Traveller must make a Difficult (10+) DEX check to dodge out of the way. If the Traveller fails, they are injured as shown on Interconnector Damage table.

Interconnector Damage

Failed by	Damage
Effect -1 to -2	1D
Effect -3 to -5	2D
Effect -6 or less	Traveller is impaled by the cable; all END is lost, STR and DEX halved; Traveller needs immediate surgery

TELEPORT CHAMBER

At the stern of the upper deck is a four-level stepped ziggurat. The steps are three metres tall, making it difficult for a human to climb from step to step (a flying Droyne could easily flap from level to level). At each level, the walls are decorated with strange and untranslatable symbols.

At the top of the ziggurat is a solid cube of metal, three metres to a side. This cube is also decorated with symbols. Experimentation with these symbols allows the Travellers to open doors in three walls of the cube. The aft face of the cube has no door. These doors just melt open but an opaque haze lingers so the Travellers cannot see inside the cube. Stepping through the harmless haze lets them enter the cube.

Inside the cube, the Travellers find a dull grey panel, like a door or full-length mirror, attached to the rear wall. Next to the panel is a circular control, composed of five small buttons, one large one and a trio of medium-sized stones. Pressing the large button causes some of the smaller ones to light up and for the grey panel to flicker and turn silvery. There is a distinct change in air pressure in the cube when this happens – the silver panel has become a teleporter, linked to a random capsule in the lower deck. The teleporter continues to cycle through destinations until the Travellers pass through it or start experimenting with the controls.

THE LOWER DECK

Ship designs vary from species-to-species but ultimately each ship is built to fulfil a particular function and form follows function. The Ancients ship was built at a technological base of TL25 and uses principles and technologies that the Imperium's scientists will not even suspect exist for another 10,000 years but its function was to serve as a carrier and so analogies can be drawn between its design and a more conventional carrier. The upper hull section is the frame of the ship, which is unchanged from mission-to-mission. The lower section, made up of interconnectors and pods, can be reconfigured for different purposes. The pods are, in effect, independent small craft carried by the larger ship.

The pods are physically connected to the Ancient ship by interconnectors but internally, they are linked by a network of teleportation portals. To navigate the ship, the Travellers must work out how to operate these portals.

GETTING TO THE BRIDGE

The Travellers' goal is to get to the bridge of the ship (Capsule A). To do so, they must learn to operate the teleporters and then find a way to get past the damaged section around Capsule 14.

MANIPULATING THE TELEPORTALS

All the teleporter panels have a common control mechanism – a ring of five buttons that light up when pressed, coupled with a central on/off switch. There are three secondary buttons below the ring, which allow the operator to alter the settings of the portal. The five buttons form a binary sequence that is the address of the target portal. For example, pressing the second, third and fifth buttons is a binary code of 01101, which on the table below equates to capsule 31.

The buttons are numbered anticlockwise starting from the bottom. Close examination of the console shows there is space for more than five buttons in the ring – the console is scalable and can work with a larger teleport network than is present on this ship.

If the central button is pressed without entering a code, the portal connects to a random capsule.

A capsule can connect to only one other capsule at a time. When two capsules are connected, Travellers can step through from one to the other but there is an energy barrier that prevents the atmospheres of the two capsules from mixing. The Travellers can easily push through this barrier.

Random capsules: To determine a random capsule, roll D66 on the Master Teleport table. A result of 61–66 brings the Travellers back to the ziggurat on the upper deck.

Getting back: A destination code of 11111 brings the Travellers back to the ziggurat on the upper deck.

Connecting to destroyed capsules: If the Travellers try to connect to one of the destroyed capsules, then the portal refuses to open. The portal flashes up a warning message across its surface, then switches itself off.

Connecting to partially destroyed capsules: If a portal is ordered to connect to a capsule with a radically different environment, including all those marked as 'partially destroyed', then all the secondary controls reset to the neutral position and the user must confirm their selection by pressing the central button again.

Secondary Controls: The three secondary controls allow a user to control the appearance and functionality of the portals, as shown on the Secondary Controls table. Each secondary control has three settings and can be pushed in or pulled out. All the secondary controls start pushed in on all consoles.

Navigating the ship: The Master Teleport table shows the arrangement of capsules and their portal addresses. Each capsule has only one portal. The 'type' column notes what is contained in the capsule – see the individual capsule descriptions on pages 101 to 107.

REMOVING PORTALS

It is possible to remove a portal from the wall it is attached to by brute force and the application of a laser or other drill. The portals continue to work even after being removed. The Travellers need to find a portable teleport control (see page 114) before they can use a stolen portal.

Portals have a maximum range of 30 light minutes (540,000,000km). So long as two or more portals are within range of one another, they automatically form a portal network.

Secondary Controls

Control	Pushed In	Neutral	Pulled Out
1 (Appearance)	Opaque portal	Portal displays incomprehensible information about destination	Transparent portal
2 (Duration)	Portal remains open until central button is pressed or another portal connects	Portal remains open for one traversal only	Portal remains open indefinitely, blocking other connections
3 (Privacy)	No privacy	Incoming portal sounds a warning chime; operator must approve connection	No connections permitted

Note that Capsule 56 is *only* accessible from the teleport network, while Capsules A, B, C and D can only be reached via the nexus capsules.

Capsules without teleporters: There are four Capsules, lettered A, B, C and D, which do not have teleporters. The Travellers can only reach these chambers from an adjacent nexus.

CAPSULES GENERAL TRAITS

Each capsule is spherical but the size of the capsule varies considerably. The smallest capsules are three metres in diameter; the largest is 150 metres across. All the capsules are made out of the same greenish substance. The interior of the capsules is marked with strange glyphs, which appear to be decorative. In fact, these are intelligent control interfaces for different purposes.

Flying Capsules: Notably, one set of controls allows a capsule to be detached from the interconnectors and flown as an independent spacecraft. Figuring out how to operate the capsules in this fashion requires an Engineer or Mechanic check.

Learning to fly a capsule: Very Difficult (12+) Engineer (m-drive) or Mechanic check (1D days, INT)
Flying a capsule: Difficult (10+) Pilot (small craft) check (1D seconds, DEX)

The capsules have Thrust 6 and have between 4 and 20 Hull points each. All mechanisms and subsystems are contained inside the capsule walls and cannot be accessed by the Travellers.

Master Teleport

Capsules	Binary Code	Type	Capsule	Binary Code	Type
11	00001	Partially Destroyed*	34	10000	Nexus (4)
12	00010	Destroyed	35	10001	Droyne Corpse
13	00011	Partially Destroyed*	36	10010	Weapons System
14	00100	Nexus (1), Partially Destroyed*	41	10011	Destroyed
15	00101	Partially Destroyed*	42	10100	Nexus (5)
16	00110	Teleport Controls	43	10101	Armoury*
21	00111	Harvester	44	10110	Destroyed
22	01000	Nexus (2)	45	10111	Shield Array**
23	01001	Repair System*	46	11000	Nexus (6)*
24	01010	Psionic Mirror	51	11001	Fallen
25	01011	Destroyed	52	11010	Dock*
26	01100	Nexus (3)	53	11011	Storeroom*
31	01101	Alien Habitat	54	11100	Nexus (7)*
32	01110	Partially Destroyed*	55	11101	Communications System
33	01111	Servitors	56	11110	Generator Portal*
			—	11111	Back to Ziggurat

* Random encounter when the Travellers enter this portal.
** This capsule cannot be accessed by teleporter.

Capsule Environments: Most of the capsules have the same environmental conditions – a breathable atmosphere, 0.8g gravity and a warm but pleasant temperature. Some have been breached; in these capsules, the atmosphere is unbreathable and the air pressure lethal (2D damage per round of exposure without a sealed suit). Note that 'down' is always towards the outside of the capsule, so the Travellers can walk around the capsule normally and there is a zero-gravity point in the exact centre of each.

Capsule Interiors: Unless otherwise noted, the capsules are devoid of internal furnishings. The capsule walls are mostly smooth apart from the glyphs; larger capsules have two parallel 'benches' running around the capsule walls at the midsection. Control systems allow the capsule interiors to be reshaped.

Entrances and Exits: Most capsules have a single teleportal. Some capsules, called nexuses, have iris hatches to neighbouring capsules, allowing Travellers to move from capsule-to-capsule without braving the teleport network. The iris hatches are clearly visible on the nexus capsule side but finding the hatch on the far side is extremely difficult unless the Travellers already know it is there; roll 11+ on 2D to find a working iris hatch by random chance or make a Difficult (10+) Science (archaeology) check (INT).

Some of the nexus capsules have capsules adjacent to them without teleportals. The Travellers cannot explore the entire ship without using both the teleport system *and* the nexuses.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Some of the capsules on the Master Teleport table are marked with asterisks (*), indicating a random encounter. Roll on the Random Encounters table to see what the Travellers discover.

NEXUS CAPSULES

The seven nexus capsules are the ship's equivalent of common areas – in addition to the usual teleport portal, each nexus has physical iris hatches leading to adjacent capsules. The Nexus table lists which capsules are accessible from each nexus.

Nexus

Nexus Capsule	Adjacent Capsules
1	A, 11, 12, 13
2	B, 15, 16, 21
3	23, 24, 34
4	26, 31, 33
5	C, 35, 36
6	D, 43, 45
7	52, 53, 55

PARTIALLY DESTROYED CAPSULES

11,13,14,15 and 32 are partially destroyed, breached during the attack on the ship 300,000 years ago and were never repaired. They are open to the atmosphere of the gas giant. A Traveller entering one of these capsules without an HEV suit or battle dress suffers 2D damage per round and must make a Difficult (10+) STR check to move. Armour other than a HEV suit, battle dress or similar provides no protection against the intense pressure.

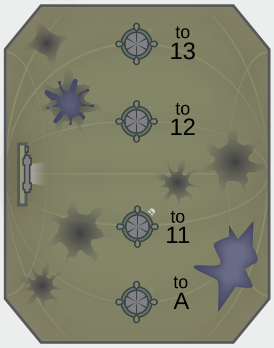
14 – NEXUS 1

This capsule is partially destroyed. Iris hatches lead to capsules A, 11, 12 and 13. The iris hatch leading to Capsule A (the bridge) is marked with an impressive glyph that the Travellers have not seen anywhere else on the ship – clearly, whatever is behind the hatch door is very important.

Random Encounters

2D	Encounter
2–3	2D wreck darters, lurking in the shadows.
4–5	The ship shudders as another hydrogen squall strikes it. Roll 1D. 1–2: The lights go out. 3–4: Artificial gravity in the capsule switches off for 2D rounds. 5–6: The capsule is cracked and the high-pressure atmosphere outside starts to push in. The capsule repairs itself in 1D minutes.
6–7	A lone wreck darter.
8–9	The Travellers find a single Ancients artefact (see page 113).
10–11	The Travellers find a cache of D3 Ancients artefacts (see page 113).
12	A treasure trove of 2D Ancients artefacts (see page 113).

14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to 11
to A

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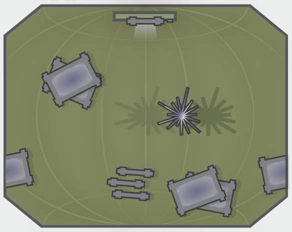

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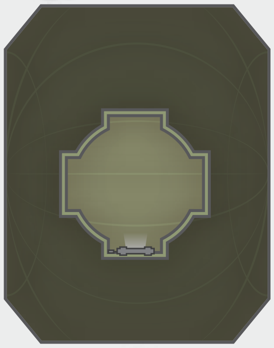

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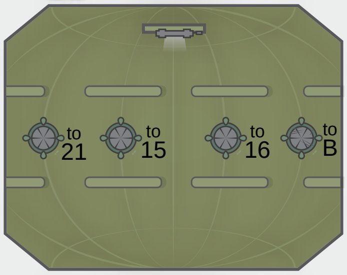
to 21
to 15
to 16
to B

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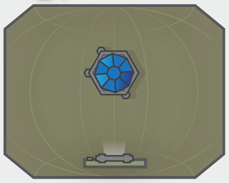

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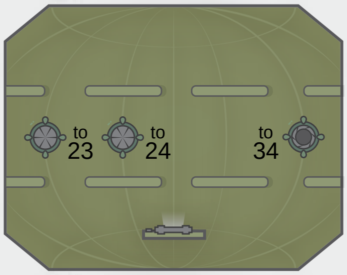
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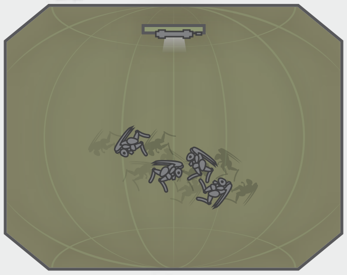

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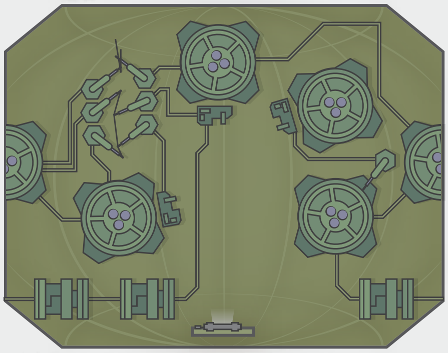

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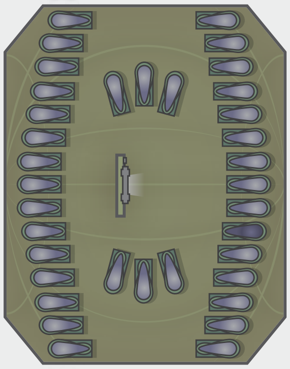

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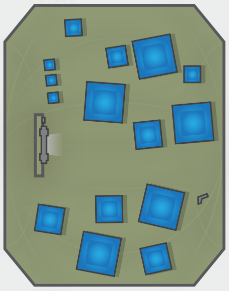

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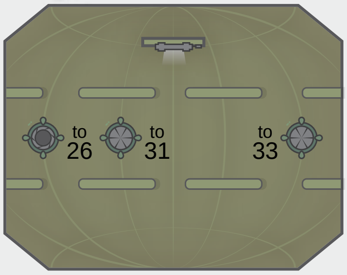
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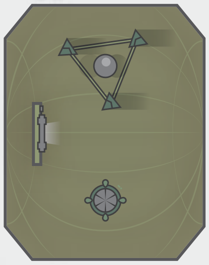

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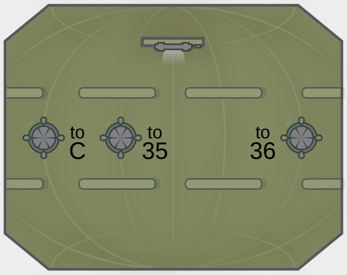
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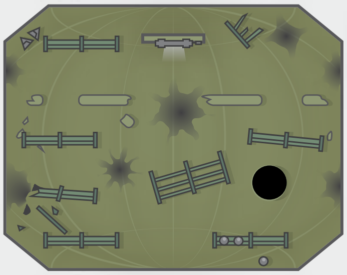

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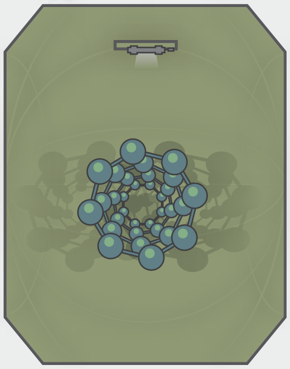

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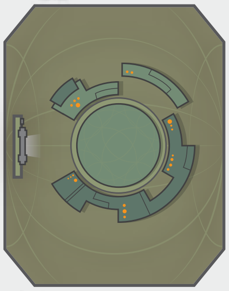

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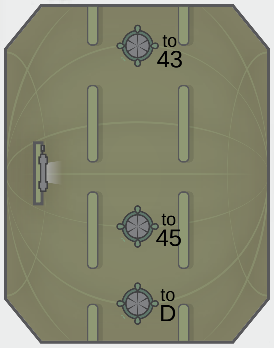
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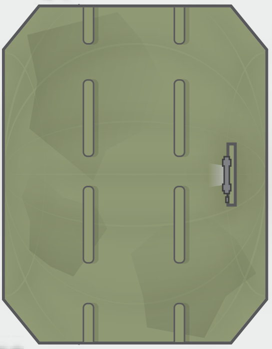

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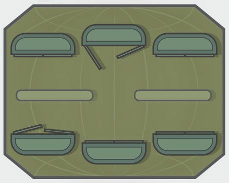

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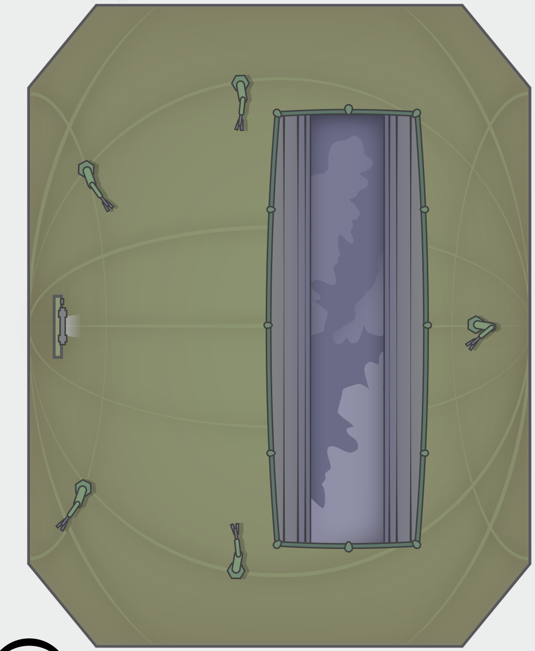

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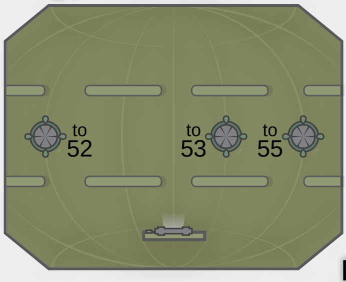
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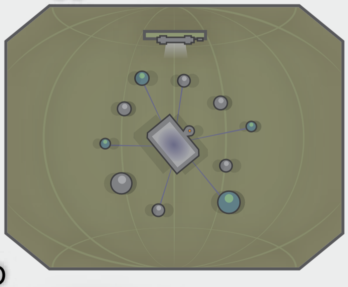

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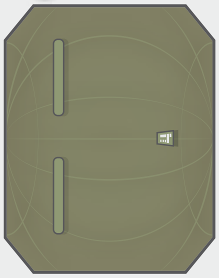

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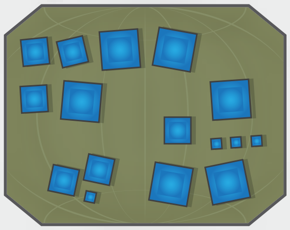


CAPSULE MAPS

16 – TELEPORT CONTROLS

This capsule contains a stack of unattached teleport portals without associated control consoles. There is also a device floating in the centre of the capsule that resembles a metal starfish that projects a constellation of lights. There are 29 lights surrounding the starfish, corresponding to the 29 functioning portals on the ship. Four of the lights have small data tags associated with them – these correspond to the locked Bridge Portal (Capsule A), the locked Shield Array Portal (Capsule 45), the active Generator Portal (Capsule 56) and the master Ziggurat Portal. Furthermore, if the Travellers make a portal connection, it is displayed on this map.

Experimenting with the device lets the Travellers activate or shut down any portal on the ship, other than the Generator Portal and the Bridge Portal. They can also bring up a directory of portal addresses – they cannot translate the meanings of the glyphs but can work out that the binary codes are destinations and that there are 26 valid code combinations available to them.

If the Travellers are completely stuck, a kind Referee might allow them to reactivate the Bridge Portal from here.

21 – HARVESTER

This capsule echoes with an alarming grinding noise. The available space in this sphere is only a fraction of its full volume, as most of the capsule is walled away. On the far side of the impenetrable wall, the starship is sucking in gases from Komesh and reprocessing them into material for repairs. At random intervals, there is a loud report from inside the machinery and the teleporter in this room flickers on and off for an instant, as a nugget of refined material is transferred to Capsule 23.

22 – NEXUS 2

Iris hatches lead to capsules B, 15, 16 and 21. The iris hatch to Capsule B is scratched. None of the Travellers' weapons or tools can make any mark on the green material, so how this damage was inflicted is a mystery.

23 – REPAIR SYSTEM

The upper half of this capsule is taken up by the ship's auto-repair system, a complex web of micro-assemblers and atomic transmuters. Millennia ago, the auto-repair system was hijacked by the intruding virus and partially disabled. Now, instead of building components the ship needs to regenerate itself, more than half of the auto-repair system is locked in a pointless loop where it produces and then destroys blocks of a highly complex heavy alloy. Examining the machinery, the Travellers can see a spinneret in the ceiling weaving strands of a black material that hangs from the ceiling. This black material looks to be as thin and delicate as gauze but a cubic centimetre of it weighs 100 tons. Another device reels in this black gauze, a millimetre at a time, and annihilates it with a disintegrator beam.

A successful Very Difficult (12+) Engineer (power) or Mechanic check (INT) lets the Travellers work out that the machinery is stuck in a loop and that disabling the spinneret or disintegrator would free up more of the ship's resources. If the Travellers find a way to disable the locked systems, the auto-repair system can turn its attention to actual damage and repair the partially damaged capsules, opening the way to the bridge.

24 – PSIONIC MIRROR

Laying discarded in this capsule is a broken device, consisting of a multi-faceted metre-tall crystal, inset into a hexapodal stand. Three of the stand's legs are broken and appear to have been cut with some sort of laser. The crystal device is a potent psionic mirror.

If a Traveller with a PSI characteristic looks into the crystal, they suddenly feel a presence manifest within the device. The mirror has created a psionic duplicate of the Traveller. The duplicate starts with PSI 2D and engages the Traveller in a mental duel. The Traveller must make an opposed Telepathy check (PSI) against the duplicate's PSI. If the Traveller wins, their PSI permanently increases by an amount relative to the duplicate's PSI (8 or less: +1, 9–11: +2, 12: +3). If the Traveller loses, their PSI permanently decreases by -1 and the crystal is suddenly occupied by a little visible holographic duplicate of the Traveller. This psionic homunculus cannot leave the crystal, nor can it communicate with those outside. However, it appears to be alive within its crystal prison – it moves around, gestures and seems to react to events outside the crystal.

If a Traveller without PSI looks into the crystal, test that Traveller's psionic potential as shown on page 196 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*. If the Traveller is discovered to have latent psionic ability, they then risk creating a duplicate.

26 – NEXUS 3

Iris hatches lead to capsules 23, 24 and 34. The iris hatch to Nexus 4 (Capsule 34) is open and cannot be shut, making the two capsules into one large chamber.

31 – ALIEN HABITAT

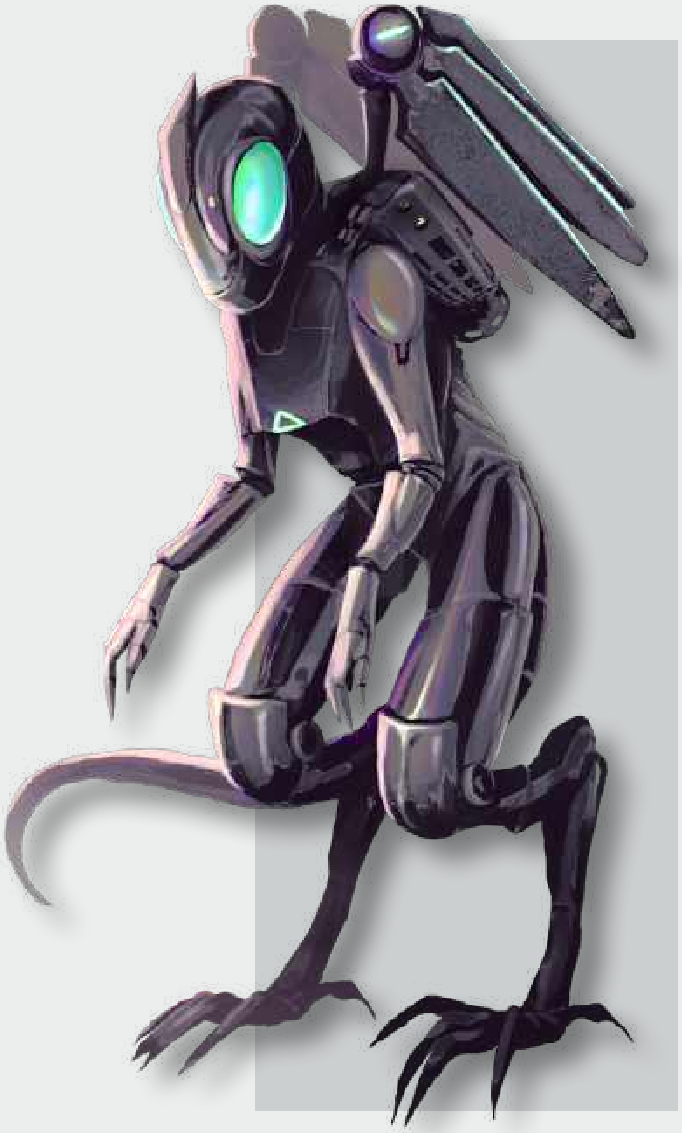
This capsule is a dangerous environment, so both the iris hatch and teleporter require user confirmation before opening into it. Inside, the air is a reddish mix of gases, including a high sulphur content; this poisonous atmosphere inflicts 1D damage per round on any Travellers without protective gear. The ambient temperature is 30 degrees K higher than in the rest of the ship. Looking around, the Travellers discover the sphere walls are dusty – this is the only dust the Travellers have encountered so far on the Ancients ship, other than the synthetic dirt on the upper deck. Dust implies decayed organic material.

300,000 years ago, the ship kept a specimen of an exotic alien race here. The specimen perished aeons ago but the ship kept samples. If the Travellers search through the dust, they find a metallic container shaped roughly like an egg. There are genetic samples and biological information encoded into this object that would allow a sufficiently skilled scientist with a well-equipped laboratory to clone the specimen. The creature's race was wiped out entirely during the Final Wars; the Travellers have the only survivor of a dead race (the nature of the alien is up to the Referee – it could be nothing more than a curiosity but could equally be an intelligent creature or engineered killing machine).

33 – SERVITORS

This room contains four small winged humanoids, floating at the zero-g point in the middle of the sphere. The humanoids are silvery in colour and made out of metal. They are in fact robots, built to resemble the Droyne who created them. These servitor robots were sent into hibernation by the ship's AI to protect them from the virus. Touching the robots reawakens them.

If the Travellers have found Ancients translator devices, they can talk to the servitors. The servitors explain that the ship was attacked by a 'Usurper' who infected the vessel with a hostile virus. They are under instructions to escort the Travellers to the bridge immediately to help effect repairs.



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Servitor	16	Grav	12m	25+	Priceless
Skills	Athletics (endurance) 3, Athletics (strength) 1, Electronics (computers) 3, Engineer (power) 3, Mechanic 2, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 2				
Attacks	Claws (2D)				
Manipulators	2 X (STR 9 DEX 12)				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+5), Flyer, (idle), Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Small (-1)				
Programming	Very Advanced (INT 12)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), PRIS Sensor, Transceiver 500km (advanced), Voder Speaker (broad spectrum), Wireless Data Link, Spare Slot 1				

If the Travellers do not have a translator device, then the servitors attempt to nonverbally coerce them to go to the bridge.

The servitors attempt to bring the Travellers via the teleporter to Nexus 1 (Capsule 14) but discover that the capsule is partially damaged. They inform the Travellers that they must obtain protective equipment – and then the virus subverts the robots' minds. One of the robots lunges forward to attack the Travellers; the other three robots grab it and dismember it. During the fight, a second robot is subverted and it destroys a third machine as it is torn apart. Finally, there is only one damaged robot left – and it is then taken over by the virus. It turns on the Travellers and tries to murder them.

34 – NEXUS 4

Iris hatches lead to Capsules 26, 31 and 33. The hatch to 26 is welded open.

35 – DROYNE CORPSE

This capsule is lined with objects that look eerily similar to low berths. There are 36 sarcophagi, all but one of which is humming quietly. One of the sarcophagi appears to have shut down; examining the silent sarcophagus reveals that the lid can be prised open. Inside, there is a thin layer of dust on a few cryptic pieces of metal and plastic. Searching through the debris, the Travellers find an Ancients translator (see page 113) and one random artefact.

No matter what the Travellers do, they are unable to open the other sarcophagi.

36 – WEAPONS SYSTEM

This capsule contained a weapon system identical to the one on the upper deck – a trio of pillars surrounding a floating ball that can fire an absurdly powerful death ray. There is an iris hatch in the wall opposite the hidden hatch leading to Capsule 42. The intent is that when the weapon is activated, the operators launch the ball out of the external hatch into space, then begin firing at the target.

42 – NEXUS 5

Iris hatches lead to Capsules C, 35 and 36. This capsule is only lightly tethered to the rest of the ship and as the Travellers walk inside, it shakes alarmingly. Any violent movement causes it to detach from the ship and fall into the gas giant's atmosphere.

43 – ARMOURY

The inside of this sphere is damaged, suggesting an Ancients firefight took place here millennia ago. Most of the room is filled with destroyed equipment of cryptic purpose but there are two items of interest here. Firstly, on the floor of the room is a perfectly spherical field of utter blackness – this is an active black globe generator that was switched on hundreds of thousands of years ago and is still running. There is no way for the Travellers to deactivate the globe.

Secondly, there are D3 disintegrator pistols (see page 114) in a rack. These weapons are still functioning, although they only have a few shots left in them.

45 – SHIELD ARRAY

This capsule is the only surviving force shield generator on the lower decks. The ship has one working generator on the upper deck, which keeps the atmosphere out, but the other generators were destroyed. The Ancients used force shields for a variety of purposes; on starships, their primary roles were as a secondary hull or method of containing breaches. Force shields were outmoded as defensive technology – white globe and black globe technology made ships essentially invulnerable to incoming fire.

To the primitive Travellers, the shield array looks like a floating cylinder made up of spheres linked by rigid rods. The cylindrical array rotates in front of the teleportation portal in this capsule. Examining the teleportation portal reveals that the third secondary control is pushed all the way in, setting this teleporter to 'privacy' mode. External connections cannot be established to this teleporter.

If this shield array were functioning, then it would wrap a shield around the lower decks and pump out the toxic atmosphere of the breached capsules. The Travellers could walk freely to the ship's bridge. However, the shield array needs power to function. Under normal operations, it would draw energy through the teleportation portal from the generator capsule (Capsule 56). If the Travellers reset the portal in this capsule, the cylinder of spheres starts to spin and a force shield flickers into existence around the lower deck.

46 – NEXUS 6

Iris hatches lead to Capsules D, 43 and 45.

51 – FALLEN

This capsule is not actually attached to the ship at all. It was dislodged by the impact of the Travellers' landing on the wreck and is currently falling into the gas giant's atmosphere. The pressure on the outside of the capsule is rising rapidly (even as its fall is slowed by the mounting viscosity of the atmosphere) and the temperature inside is also climbing. From inside the capsule, the Travellers can feel vibrations and hear the howl of the winds outside.

Obviously, the only way in or out of this capsule is via the teleporter. If the Travellers do not leave promptly, the capsule approaches crush depth. They hear a warning chime and then the walls start buckling. This knocks the teleportation portal off the wall; to escape, the Travellers must immediately prop the teleport panel up, dial a safe address and jump through.

Note that the crush depth for the portal is greater than that of the capsule. If the Travellers dial back to this portal, they will be warned that conditions on the far side are dangerous but they can still commit suicide by teleporter if they work at it.

52 – DOCK

This capsule serves as a docking port for conventional spacecraft. It is the largest that the Travellers have encountered so far, with a radius of 75 metres. The wall of the sphere can open like a clamshell to take smaller ships on board. If the Travellers approach the lower decks with the *Star Hunter*, then this capsule opens to welcome them. Once the capsule seals itself again, it pumps the gas giant's atmosphere out and replaces it with a breathable oxygen atmosphere.

There are no other vessels in this spacedock.

53 – STOREROOM

The Ancients ship had microfabricators that could create items on demand; the items in this storeroom are spare parts and tools that were computationally or energetically demanding, so it was easier to make them in bulk and store them instead of building individually when needed. This capsule is crammed with Ancients storage containers. These containers are cubes of a blue substance that looks like ice but is not cold or slippery to the touch. The cubes have a range of sizes, from small enough to fit on a Traveller's hand to two metres in height.

If the Travellers stand next to a cube, or leave an object close by, then the blue ice starts to grow towards the object. Left unchecked, the blue ice grows to cover the object (or even a resolutely unmoving Traveller) and forms itself into a cube that contains the object. Anything left near a storage cube is assumed to be destined for storage. If a foreign object is removed before it is encased, the ice retreats back to its default cubical state.

If the Travellers search around, they find a gun-like object. If pressed to a cube and triggered, this device causes the cube to melt (or, more accurately, sublime – the blue ice boils away into a gas that adheres to the surface of other blue cubes), revealing whatever equipment is kept within. Most equipment in these containers are unidentifiable machine parts but if the Travellers open all the cubes, roll three times on the Ancient Artefacts table.

Note that there is a random encounter (see page 101) in this room – if you roll a creature, then that creature is native fauna of Komesh that entered hibernation in this room and got encased by a blue cube. If the Travellers conscientiously open all the cubes, they release the creature.

54 – NEXUS 7

Iris hatches lead to Capsules 52, 53 and 55.

55 – COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

This capsule houses the ship's communications system. In the centre of the capsule's floor is a raised dais while around the walls are blocky machines, including one with a control console. If a Traveller stands on the dais, this console lights up and can be interacted with. The console resembles the ones used to control the teleporters – it has a set of smaller buttons to generate a binary address, a larger on/off button and a set of secondary controls used to manipulate various aspects of the transmission. There is also another dial associated with the address buttons. This dial lets the operator select various pre-set broadcasts, such as 'all ships in the local area, report back to base' and so on.

The Ancients used several different communications methods. Even for Grandfather, the speed of light represented an insurmountable barrier for conventional communications. The Ancients had methods of sending energy through jumpspace without needing a ship – the teleport portals use a similar principle – but this proved ineffective for two-way communication. Over short ranges, the Ancients used mesons, radio and laser communications; for faster-than-light, they relied on quantum entangled ancibles (highly effective but limited by the number of entangled bits) and psionic telepathy.

The dais is a telepathic transceiver. A Traveller standing on the dais when the communications machine is activated feels a strange pressure in their temples. The Travellers have no chance of dialling up a valid communications address by trial and error (there are millions of possible combinations) but if they experiment with the dial of pre-set options, they can establish psionic communications with six extant Ancients bases. Roll on the Ancients bases table when a Traveller moves the dial; they experience their minds being wrenched and stretched across dozens of light years. From the point of view of an observer on the far end, the Traveller appears to be a ghostly projection, more like a memory than an actual vision.

56 – GENERATOR PORTAL

This capsule contains two teleportation portals – the standard one attached to the wall and a free-floating one in the middle of the chamber, surrounded by silvery tendrils and metallic spheres of unclear purpose. There is also a control panel attached to it.

The Ancients ship does not use anything as primitive as a fusion reactor or antimatter to power itself. Instead, it contains a portal to a pocket universe, one that contains nothing but a single star. In effect, the ship has all the energy wealth of a Dyson sphere. All the energy that the ship can ever need is drawn through a portal in this capsule.

The standard portal in this capsule flickers on and off every few seconds, when it needs to transmit power from the generator portal to another part of the ship.

Fortunately for the Travellers, there is no way to override the ship's safety protocols and fully open the portal (doing so would effectively put the Travellers and the ship on the surface of a star, instantly vaporising them). Fiddling with the controls lets the Travellers bring up a holographic display of the fuel star.

A – BRIDGE

Reaching the ship's bridge triggers the endgame of this adventure – see page 110.

B – LOCKER

This capsule contains a set of six Ancients encounter suits. See page 113.

C – SHUTTLE

While all capsules can be flown as independent space craft, this one was left with 'the engine running' – the flight controls are already active. It looks like just another small capsule, apart from the glowing glyphs on one wall. Touching a glyph causes the shuttle to detach from the ship and fall into the gas giant. The Travellers have about 20 minutes of free-fall before the external pressure becomes dangerous.

Normally, it would take days to work out how to fly a capsule but as the flight controls are already active, the Travellers are dealing with an easier problem.

Learning to fly a capsule: Difficult (10+) Engineer (m-drive) or Mechanic check (1D minutes, INT)
Flying a capsule: Average (8+) Pilot (small craft) check (1D seconds, DEX)

If the Travellers have an Ancients translator device, they receive DM+2 to attempts to decipher the controls.

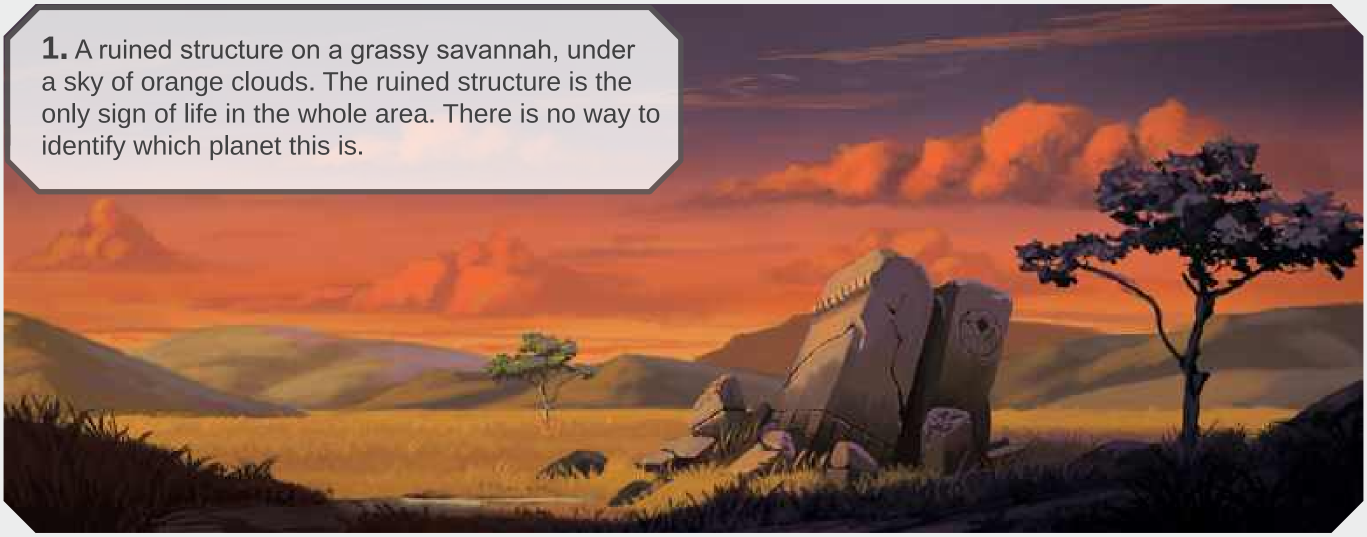
When (or if) the Travellers gain control of the capsule, they can fly back to the ship and dock with the interconnectors adjacent to the bridge.

D – STOREROOM

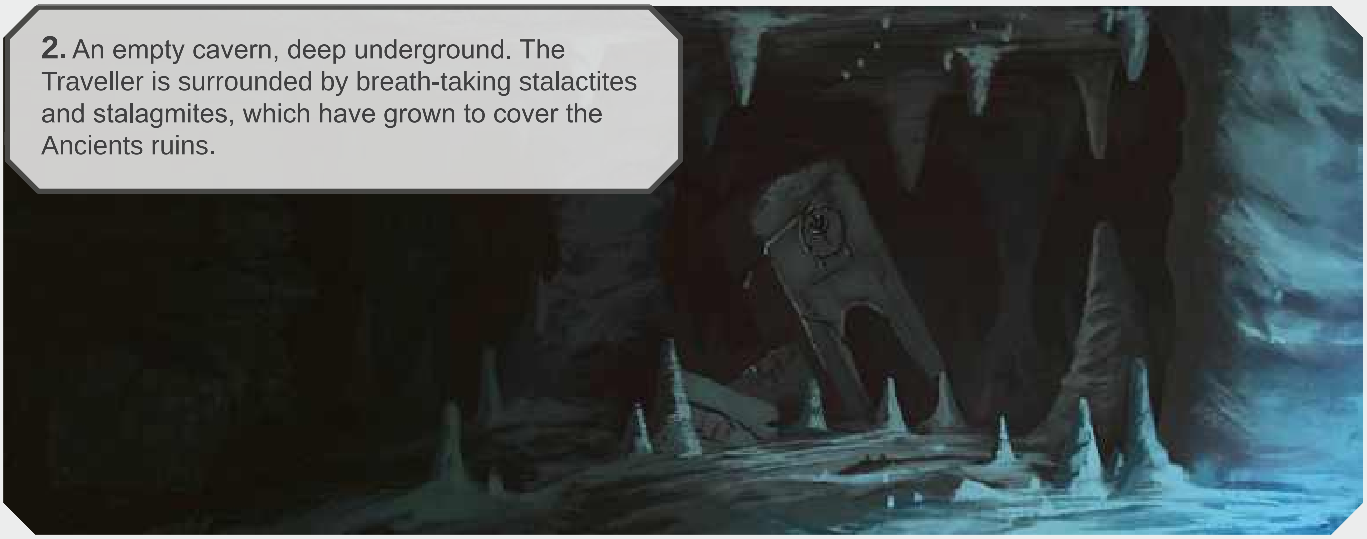
This room is identical to Capsule 53.

Ancients Bases

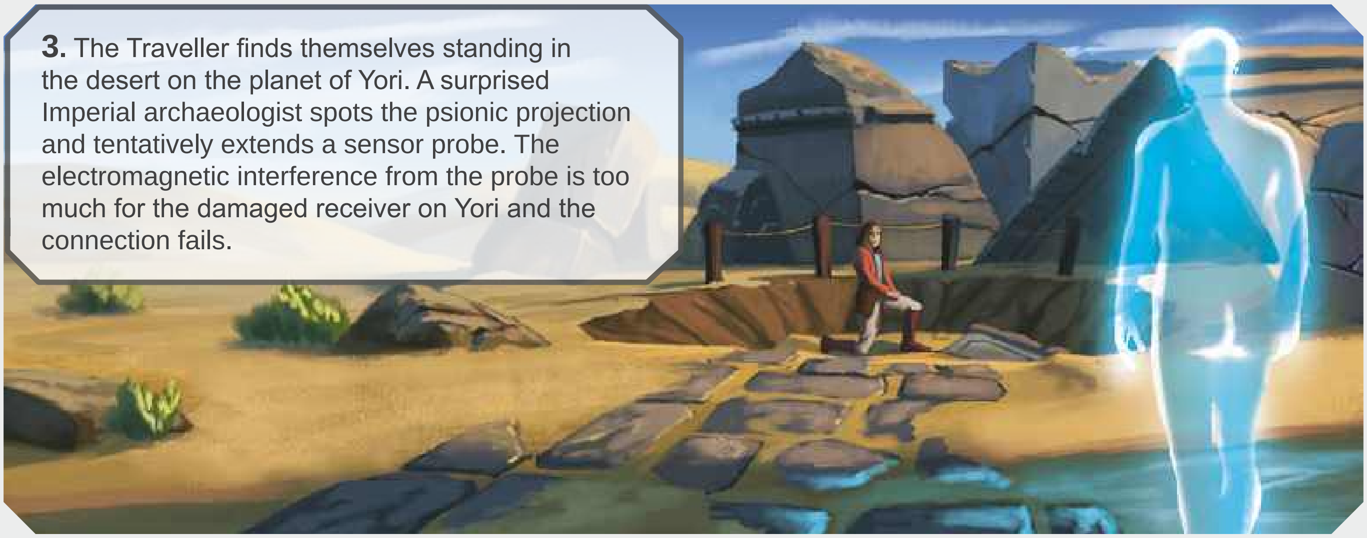
Roll 1D to determine the destination.



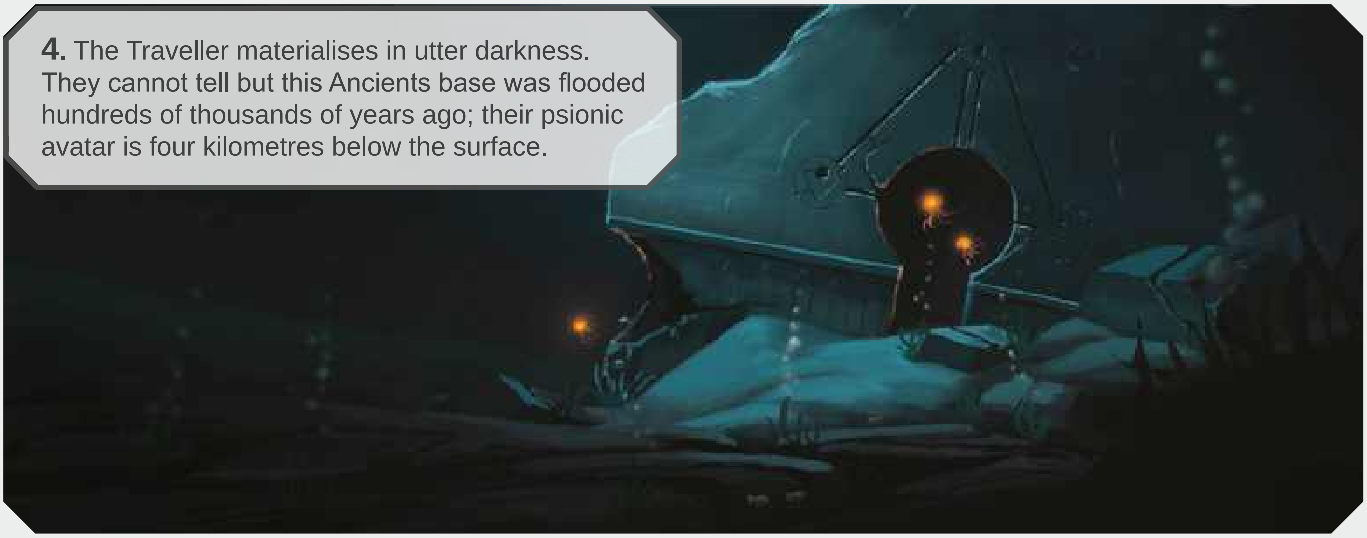
1. A ruined structure on a grassy savannah, under a sky of orange clouds. The ruined structure is the only sign of life in the whole area. There is no way to identify which planet this is.



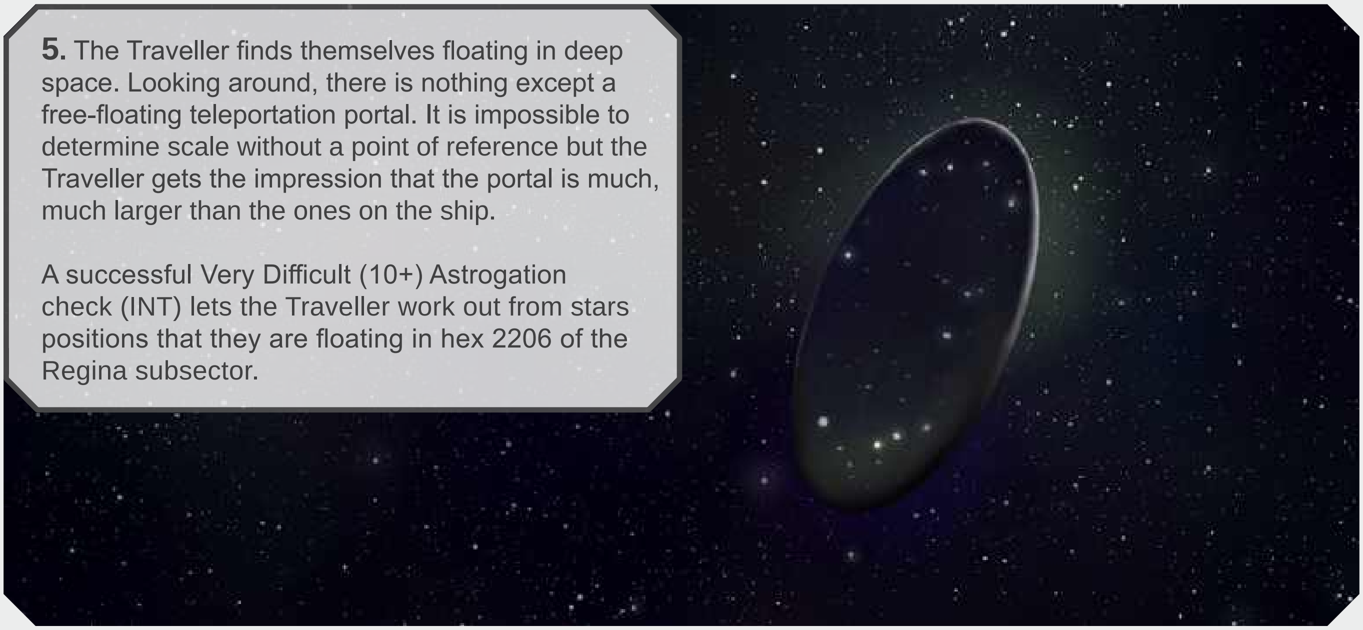
2. An empty cavern, deep underground. The Traveller is surrounded by breath-taking stalactites and stalagmites, which have grown to cover the Ancients ruins.



3. The Traveller finds themselves standing in the desert on the planet of Yori. A surprised Imperial archaeologist spots the psionic projection and tentatively extends a sensor probe. The electromagnetic interference from the probe is too much for the damaged receiver on Yori and the connection fails.

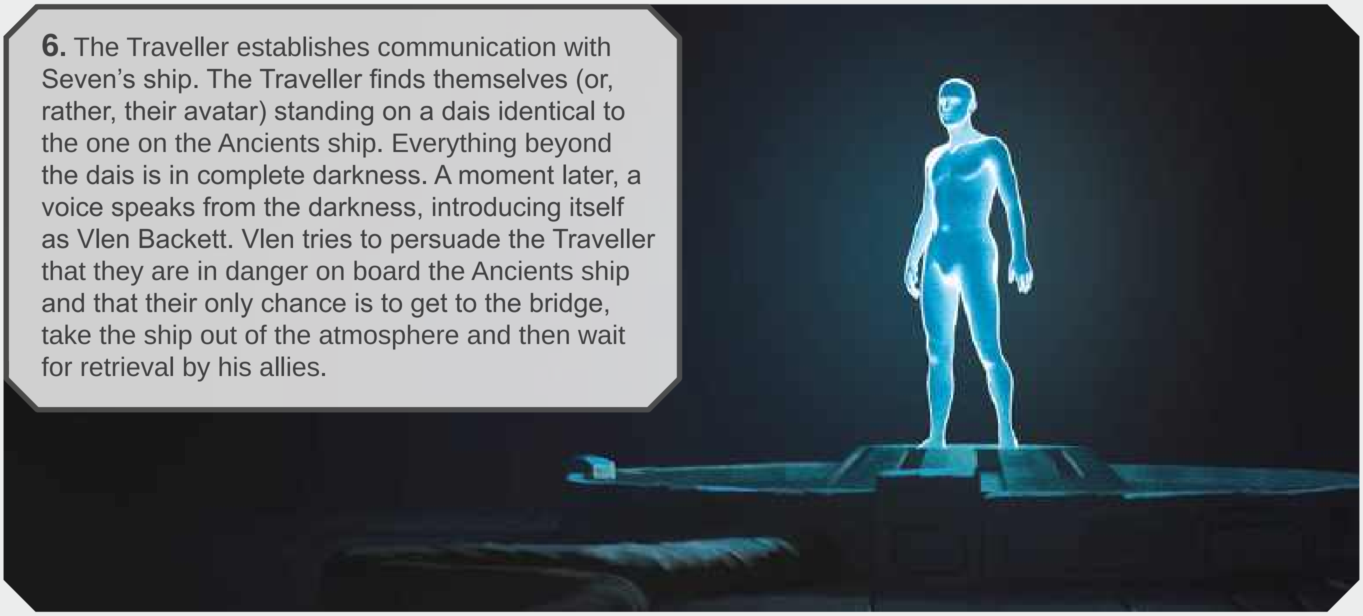


4. The Traveller materialises in utter darkness. They cannot tell but this Ancients base was flooded hundreds of thousands of years ago; their psionic avatar is four kilometres below the surface.

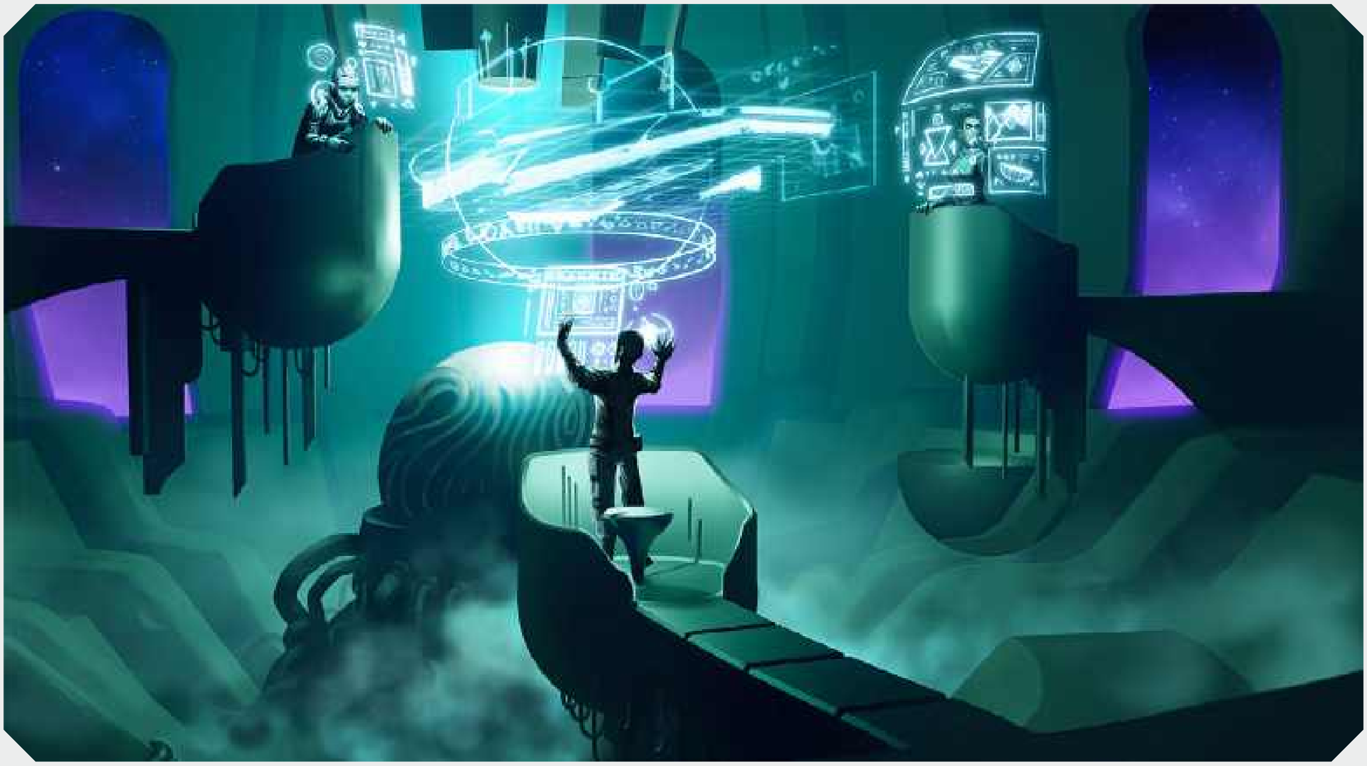


5. The Traveller finds themselves floating in deep space. Looking around, there is nothing except a free-floating teleportation portal. It is impossible to determine scale without a point of reference but the Traveller gets the impression that the portal is much, much larger than the ones on the ship.

A successful Very Difficult (10+) Astrogation check (INT) lets the Traveller work out from stars positions that they are floating in hex 2206 of the Regina subsector.



6. The Traveller establishes communication with Seven's ship. The Traveller finds themselves (or, rather, their avatar) standing on a dais identical to the one on the Ancients ship. Everything beyond the dais is in complete darkness. A moment later, a voice speaks from the darkness, introducing itself as Vlen Backett. Vlen tries to persuade the Traveller that they are in danger on board the Ancients ship and that their only chance is to get to the bridge, take the ship out of the atmosphere and then wait for retrieval by his allies.



AWAKENING

By trial and error, the Travellers find their way onto the ship's bridge. Read the following to them:

Unlike the other capsules you have visited, the walls of this one are covered in thousands of glowing symbols that scroll and shift around. In the centre of the capsule is a sort of chair or perch and a holographic field of rippling colours hangs over the chair.

The hologram changes to project a geometric symbol in the air over your heads. A voice speaks in a strange language.

If the Travellers have an Ancients translator, they can translate the message from the ship's computer. Otherwise, they need to search around the bridge; they will find a translator device tucked into the chair.

'*Severe damage has been sustained to all systems. My auto-repair units are unable to fully rectify the damage. My shipmind has been compromised by a hostile intelligence. As per emergency protocols, I am ceding command to the surviving crew. You are requested to guide the ship to Home. Please select from the following options – maintain position or move to a higher orbit.*'

When the Travellers tell the ship to move to a higher orbit, it obeys. The vast Ancients vessel drags itself out of Komesh's gravity well, where it detects another ship in orbit. The holographic screen displays an image of that ship – it is the *Alahir.*

The Ancients vessel lists more options for the Travellers – open fire, initiate evasive action or initiate jump. If they pick 'open fire', the ship responds that the weapons are offline (the Travellers can manually fire the weapons from the upper deck, if they know how). If they initiate evasive action, their ship starts weaving and dancing rings around the *Alahir*, its 10,000-ton bulk manoeuvring with unbelievable agility. If they select jump, then the jump engines start charging up but do not activate until *Decision Point*, on page 112.

THE ALAHIR

Captain Gand Holcess hails the Ancients ship. He pretends to be confident but the Travellers can hear equal notes of terror and wonder in his voice.

'*This is the Imperial vessel* Alahir *and you are in violation of our space. Identify yourselves immediately.*'

If the Travellers respond, he recognises their voices and asks them what they are doing on board an Ancients ship. Holcess knows the Travellers have the upper hand at this point – the *Alahir* is obviously completely outclassed by the Ancients ship, even considering the damage suffered by the older vessel. The captain is therefore conciliatory, asking the Travellers to turn the ship over to the Imperium in exchange for a complete pardon and a handsome reward.

This is a pivotal scene – up until now, Imperial Intelligence has been the main antagonist in the *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign. You are about to introduce the real villain, so you need to make Holcess sympathetic. Have him explain why he suspected Vlen Backett of being in league with criminal syndicates or strange cults; have him praise the Travellers' discovery of an alien ship. He points out that Ancients technology could de-stabilise the delicate balance of power between the Imperium and other great powers – if the Zhodani got their hands on an Ancients superweapon, the Spinward Marches would be swiftly conquered. Holcess holds out an offer of forgiveness and understanding – if the Travellers will work with him in plumbing the secrets of the Ancients, they will have every honour the Emperor can bestow upon them.

HE COMES

Another ship jumps in, well within the 100-diameter jump limit of the gas giant.

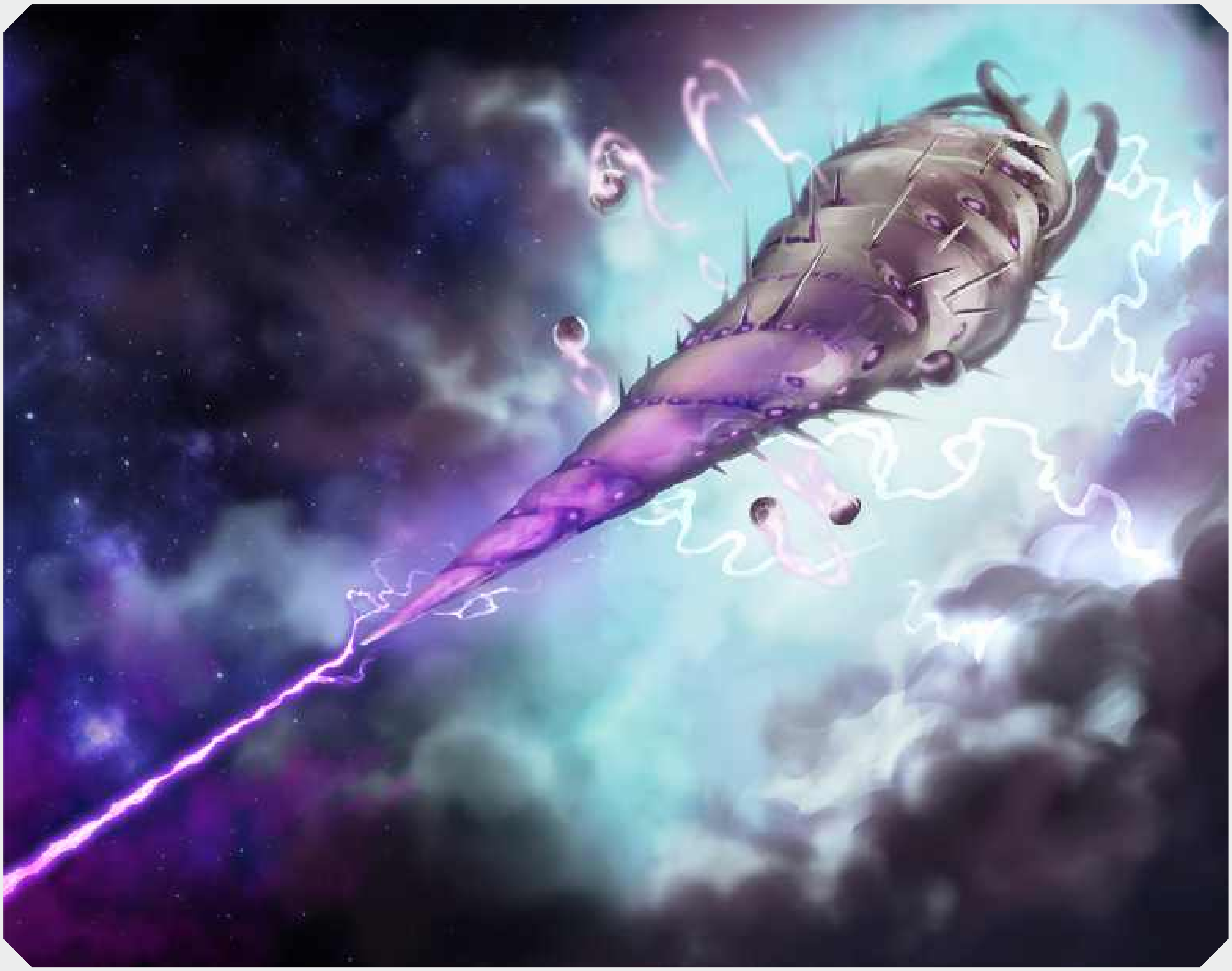
It is a design that none of the Travellers have seen before, although they detected its presence over Alell.

The Droyne of Beck's World glimpsed it, moments before it annihilated their colony.

It is Seven, one of the treacherous Sons of Grandfather.

The ship is a pearly white cone, like a narwhal's horn. As it approaches, it spins and long tendrils unfurl. Spikes sprout from along the ship's flanks. White spots – mobile white globes – orbit around the ship, waxing and waning in response to perceived threats.

The *Alahir* turns towards this new threat but a single pulse from a weapons turret utterly destroys the Imperial ship. The cone turns towards the Travellers' ship.



REUNION

Read the following out loud:

'Hostile vessel! Tactical guidance required!' shrieks the ship. A moment later, it announces 'Incoming audio transmission' and a familiar voice fills the air.

Seven made a copy of Vlen's mindstate from the corpse on Alell and followed the Travellers here but Vlen will not explain that unless pressed on the matter. He addresses himself to his relative, the Inheritor.

'Listen, it's Uncle Vlen. Don't mind how, you've got to trust me. I need you to disable the computer system on that 300,000 year old rust bucket you're flying. If you've got a weapon that can damage it, then just blow a chunk out of the wall. Otherwise, see if you can turn it off or order it to stand down, before it drags you off somewhere.'

Backett's mission is to capture the Ancients ship intact if possible. He tries to convince the Travellers to destroy their ship's computer with a disintegrator blast, although if they tell him that the ship's computer seems to be deferring to them, then he tells them to give it no orders. If the Travellers ask how he survived, he tries to dodge the question but then admits the truth.

'The Ancients are still around – some of them, anyway. I've worked for Seven for a very long time. They don't want to interfere with Humaniti but they want to keep an eye on us, so they use human agents. When I... when the previous version of me died, they were able to copy my memories into a new cloned body. I'm still your Uncle Vlen. It's still me.'

If the Travellers ask Vlen to transmit a visual image, he complies. The sight is a hideous one – slabs of freshly cloned flesh over a synthetic skeleton that is still growing. Every part of the body, even the exposed brain, is laced with alien circuitry. The horrific sight should be enough to convince doubters that trusting 'Uncle Vlen' would not be a good idea.

DECISION POINT

If the Travellers obey Vlen, then by rights the campaign ends here. Seven consumes the smaller ship and wipes out all life on board. The Travellers are utterly irrelevant to its aims. If they are very lucky, then it scans their brains and creates virtual copies of their personalities for future reference but the Travellers themselves are very, very dead. A merciful Referee could make Vlen have a change of heart or a moment of free will and urge the Travellers to jump away.

If the Travellers do not obey, or else argue for too long, then the ship's jump engines trigger and the Ancients ship leaps into jumpspace.

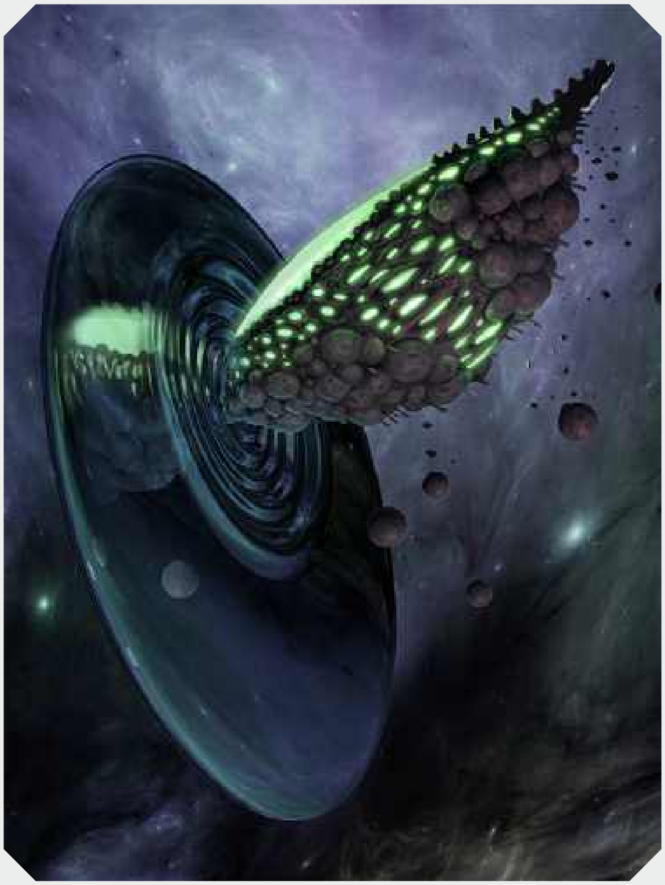
Especially brave Travellers might try turning their weapons on Seven; this surprise attack buys them a few seconds before jumping but there is no chance for the Ancients ship to defeat the other Ancients vessel. One is a severely damaged merchantman; the other is an actual Ancient in a robotic body that has been honed as a weapon for 300,000 years. In an open firefight, Seven could destroy the Ancients ship with as much ease as it swatted the *Alahir.*

JUMP!

The Ancients ship travels through jumpspace for a week. The Travellers can salvage food from the *Star Hunter* and the Ancients ship can provide water. After a week in jump, it arrives in deep space, far from any planets or stars. The Travellers are in empty hex 2206 of the Regina subsector.

The lights of the ship illuminate an object floating dead ahead. It is another teleportation portal, identical to the ones on the ship in all respects other than size – this one is 128 times larger.

The Ancients ship approaches the portal...



ANCIENT ARTEFACTS

The Ancients supercivilisation endured for thousands of years. They built their machines to last but the gulf of millennia that separates them from the present day is unimaginably long. Five hundred years is enough time to remove most evidence of a civilisation; 10,000 years leaves nothing but a few buried pieces of archaeology and the traces of vanished ruins. Even the Ancients fell prey to the ravages of time.

The Ancients ship in this chapter is an anomaly – its position in the gas giant protected it from looters and other disasters, and being on board a ship sheltered its contents from erosion and environmental damage. There are numerous intact artefacts on board.

Most of these artefacts are incomprehensible to the Travellers. They are spare parts for machines that have been dust for 3,000 centuries, components of vanished technologies or tools to perform functions that Humaniti will not even dream about for thousands of years. The Travellers are primitives picking the bones of an older, vastly more advanced civilisation.

If the Travellers find a working artefact, they still need to learn how to operate it. This requires a combination of experimentation, research and knowledge of the field most closely related to the artefact. For example, understanding an Ancient repair tool might require a Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check (1D weeks, EDU), with DM+1 if the Traveller has an appropriate Profession skill.

A success on this check means the Traveller has worked out the function of most of the controls on the device and possibly even has a vague idea of the principles behind its operation, even if they cannot understand how the device actually utilises those principles (*'it somehow knows what's wrong with a machine... maybe it's got an incredibly small but accurate densitometer that scans the target from the outside and identifies problems').*

Many artefacts can be used without understanding them. Disintegrator pistols, for instance, are highly complex devices but can be fired just by pressing the control stud. A Traveller might not be able to adjust the beam, reload the weapon, tell that it needs to be reloaded, or repair it if it gets damaged, but they know that pressing the red button makes things disappear. Similarly, a Traveller might be able to work out how to use the metal-bonding function of the repair tool even if they do not understand all the subtleties of the tool.

Devices on the Ship: If the Travellers find an Ancients artefact on the ship, roll on the Ancients Devices table to determine what they find.

Ancients Devices

3D	Device
3–4	Damaged Device
5–6	Junk
7–10	Incomprehensible Relic
11–12	Encounter Suit
13–14	Translator Device
15	Disintegrator Pistol
16	Psionic Resonator
17	Repair Tool
18	Portable Teleport Control

Damaged Device: Roll again to determine what artefact they actually found. This artefact is damaged and cannot be repaired but the Traveller gains DM+1 when figuring out the purpose of similar gadgets.

Junk: Spare parts, broken bits of metal.

Incomprehensible Relic: It is a... thing. It might be worth something to a collector.

Encounter Suit: This is an Ancients spacesuit, consisting of a silver disk that adheres to the skin of a living being. If pressed, the disk flows over the wearer's body and becomes a form-fitting spacesuit. It will cover clothing but is not compatible with armour other than cloth armour or high-TL vacc suits. The suit provides Protection +9 and protects against pressure, radiation and temperature extremes like an HEV suit. The suit contains 12 hours of oxygen and has an integrated rebreather.

Operating the suit: Difficult (10+) Vacc Suit check (1D minutes, INT)
Understanding the suit: Very Difficult (12+) Vacc Suit check (1D weeks, EDU)

Translator Device: The translator device is a small ovoid that can be held in the palm of a hand or pressed onto a surface to which it will automatically adhere. To activate the translator, it must be held to the forehead (for the clearest signal) and the control stud pressed. The translator then scans the language centre of the brain and provides a translation for any speech or text it has in its databanks. It provides the translation via ultra-low-frequency subliminal sonic beams or light beams, so the user is initially unaware of the source of the translation. The translator only works on species whose brain configuration was studied by the Ancients, so only humans, Droyne and Vargr can use the device.

If the user does not hold the translator to their forehead when activating it, the machine can still function but does not get a clear scan of the user's language centre. Therefore, the translation it provides is incomplete or disjointed.

Operating the translator: Difficult (10+) Science (linguistics) check (1D minutes, INT)
Understanding the translator: Very Difficult (10+) Science (biology) check (1D months, EDU)

Disintegrator Pistol: This matter disintegrator is a short black rod, small enough to be carried in one hand. There is no barrel; the disintegrator effect is emitted from a crystal panel at one end. The effect is invisible by default but secondary controls allow the user to add a visible light beam to aid with targeting. The disintegrator is capable of auto-targeting enemies, attacking with an effective DM+3 but Travellers can only use this function if they fully understand the weapon's controls. The disintegrator has a magazine of 1D shots when found and cannot be easily recharged by the Travellers.

Operating the pistol: Difficult (10+) Gun Combat (energy) check (1D minutes, INT)
Understanding the pistol: Very Difficult (12+) Science (physics) check (1D months, EDU)

Psionic Resonator: This device is of use only to Travellers with psionic abilities. The resonator is a belt or bandolier studded with small greenish rectangular objects. These crystals absorb the wearer's psionic power and feed it back to when needed. When the belt is worn, the user is drained of one PSI point each hour until all of the green crystals are charged (belts contain 1D+2 crystals). The user's PSI recharges normally when the belt is full. If the belt is removed, the crystals instantly discharge their energy harmlessly.

A Traveller wearing a charged belt can draw PSI points from the crystals as needed.

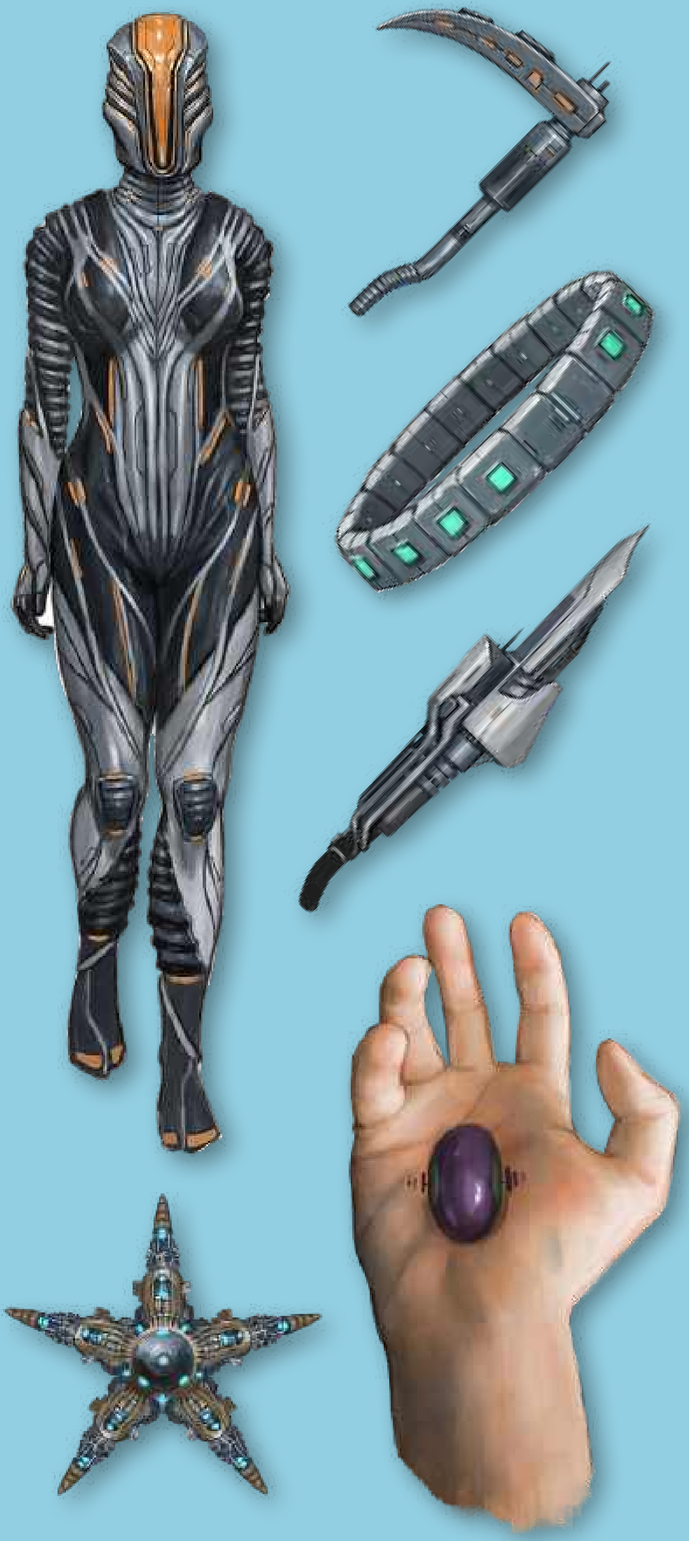
Operating the belt: Automatic
Understanding the belt: Formidable (14+) Science (psionicology) check (1D months, EDU)

Repair Tool: The repair tool is a curved blade, like a handheld sickle, with controls on the inner curve of the device as well as on the handle. Adjusting the controls lets the device produce all sort of effects, from microscopic manipulation to testing circuits and creating holographic images of the inside of objects. The basic function that the Travellers can access, however, is the cutting and welding function which lets them cut and repair holes in the green matter of the capsule walls on board the Ancients ship. The repair tool has a limited battery and cannot be easily recharged.

Operating the repair tool: Difficult (10+) Mechanic check (1Dx10 minutes, INT)
Understanding the repair tool: Formidable (14+) Science (physics) check (1D months, EDU)

Portable Teleport Control: A portable version of the standard teleport console.

Operating the control: Automatic if the Travellers have figured out how to use the other controls; otherwise Very Difficult (12+) Science (archaeology) check (1Dx10 minutes, INT)
Understanding the control: Impossible (16+) Science (physics) check (1D months, EDU)



OTHERWORLD

God is cruel. God sent us into this world to suffer. When I defeat all of these trials by my strength and cunning, I shall find God and tear him down from his throne. God made us to suffer and, by suffering, to grow strong.
— Cant of the Hunters

The Ancients ship locates a portal and slips through it into a strange new world. After passing through a starport, the Travellers can explore the habitats accessible from it. Three are inhabited by the descendants of old experiments of Grandfather and the Travellers' arrival on the abandoned planet means the teleporter network is temporarily reactivated, allowing the habitats to interact.

The Travellers can explore the habitats. They soon learn that there is a transport hub and have to find a way to cross the dangerous habitats and deal with the inhabitants and experiments.

Eventually, the Travellers find the transportation hub but the door is sealed. They need to negotiate with the last custodian robot for access – it initially mistakes them for experiments but soon realises they are visitors from outside and lets them into the hub. There, the Travellers discover they are inside a small pocket universe containing three entire star systems.

The robot transports them to the core world, for an audience with Grandfather himself. Grandfather is an ancient Droyne; he meets with the Travellers but does not have much time to chat – he is busy building a superweapon. The ship that wiped out the *Alahir* was one of his Sons, another Ancient, who went down a very different development path to Grandfather. It is currently trying to break through the same portal the Travellers came through…

THE POCKET UNIVERSE

The universe in which we all live is formed from a sort of fabric, usually flat in the spaces between the systems but bunched up and wrinkled by mass and gravity near planets and stars.

Sometimes, it is possible to pinch off a part of the universe, physically separating the underlying fabric from the rest of the universe. Such a place is a pocket universe; complete unto itself, independent of our own universe, isolated from us.

Grandfather lives in such a place. His pocket universe, which he created more than 300,000 years ago, is large by most standards, reaching almost three parsecs across and containing three separate star systems.

This pocket universe was created by expending a great deal of energy (both personal and fusion) to rip the fabric of space and close it off from the rest of the universe.

Earlier projects in the creation of pocket universes for the production of teleportation networks and starships had given Grandfather the expertise he needed for this task. His experimental work had shown him techniques and methods that allowed him to produce the pocket universe. The techniques are long and difficult, and require extensive manipulation of gravity in order to rip the fabric of space. Experience had shown Grandfather that creation of small pocket universes took several years of work; the pocket universe he finally made took almost 100 years to produce and that did not include time for improvements to the worlds within it.

Grandfather's creation was the largest pocket universe he had ever attempted and it exceeded his previous pocket universes by a factor of more than 100,000; earlier pocket universes were hardly larger than a star system, while this one was several parsecs across.

POCKET ASTROGRAPHY

This pocket universe contains three star systems arranged in a triangular configuration. Each system is about one parsec from the others.

The boundary of the pocket universe is about half a parsec beyond the systems, giving it a total diameter of slightly more than three parsecs.

A Closed System: The pocket universe is a closed universe; it folds back onto itself. Reaching the edge of the pocket universe is impossible; a course is bent back onto itself and the Travellers' ship just seems to come back into the pocket universe from the other direction.

Because of this closed system effect, light is also constantly returning to the three star systems. Wherever someone looks, the light from the three stars is returning. As a result, space is not black but glows with the light of 300,000 years of starglow. Because this light is returning from every direction, there are no distinct star images in the sky, only a glow, enough to cut the black of space but not quite bright enough to read by. As time passes, this light will grow brighter and brighter and as the stars grow dimmer and die, space will become an even light source from all directions.

Physical Laws: The laws of physics, chemistry and all the sciences continue in force in this pocket universe. Whatever could or does happen in our own universe also happens for the same reasons in the pocket universe.

THE THREE SYSTEMS

The pocket universe has three systems, each of which Grandfather chose for a specific reason.

Grandfather's System: Early in his life, Grandfather selected a star system as a base for his activities and this system became the core of his pocket universe. Of the several planets within the system, the main one is physically almost identical to the Droyne homeworld and has been seeded with animals and plants from it.

Other worlds in the system serve as industrial complexes, research laboratories, sources of minerals and rarities, and storehouses.

The Droyne System: One star system has been reserved for the Droyne. The faction which stood by Grandfather during the Final War was given an entire star system for their own use.

They are restricted to that system and Grandfather does not allow them jump drives. On their own, they have adopted an easy-going pastoral life devoted to comfort and the pursuit of happiness – which, for them, involves the continuity of their community, the raising of food, the production of materials to meet their needs and little else.

Grandfather has kept this group of Droyne in his pocket universe as a hedge against the future. They are conditioned to respect and revere him, and obey his orders without question. At some time in the future, should Grandfather need Droyne for breeding purposes, experimentation, colonisation, or even as soldiers, he has a ready supply available.

The Abandoned System: The third system is a graveyard of old experiments, outdated equipment and other junk. Anything that Grandfather has previously experimented with but is no longer interested in gets dumped here.

ACCESS TO THE POCKET UNIVERSE

When Grandfather created the pocket universe, he established several portals to allow access between it and our universe. Some allowed transport of equipment and resources to his new home, others allowed him to travel between the universes on various projects.

In the first 250,000 years after the creation of the pocket universe, Grandfather made infrequent trips out. He visited many former Droyne worlds ravaged or destroyed by the Final War. Where destruction of their technological base was not complete, he finished the job. He also struck at the works and power bases of the few surviving Sons.

Eventually, voyages out of the pocket universe became too dangerous. The younger races were expanding and would soon discover the portals scattered across the Regina system. Worse, the surviving Sons were drawing ever closer to discovering Grandfather's refuge – hiding in a pocket universe was only ever a stopgap measure. Over time, he closed down almost all the portals leading to his pocket universe, until only one was left – the portal that the Ancients ship has just activated.

THE ENEMY AT THE GATES

The renegade Son who encountered the Travellers at Komesh, Seven, traced their jump trajectory to Grandfather's portal. He lacks the code keys to activate the portal but Grandfather's security systems are hundreds of thousands of years old and can be overwhelmed. In a short time, Seven will break through into Grandfather's pocket universe and the war between Grandfather and his offspring will continue.

The Travellers may not be aware of it but they have a time limit in this adventure. The Ancient breaks through the portal approximately 168 hours (seven days) after they arrive. The Referee can adjust this time limit as needed – the purpose is to keep pressure on the Travellers, not to wipe them out because of a poor dice roll.

As Seven besieges the exit portal, it causes visible effects within the pocket universe. The exit portal is in orbit of the mainworld of the abandoned system.

Seven's attacks cause the portal to glow brightly with Cherenkov radiation; it flares like a sudden blue star above the abandoned world.

If the Travellers tarry too long in one of the sections of this adventure, then Seven breaks through. The hostile Ancient has little interest in the Travellers or the abandoned experiments on this world, so it jumps almost immediately for Grandfather's world in the next system over.

Shortly afterwards, the Droyne custodian (see page 132) tracks down the Travellers, no matter where they are, and paralyses them with a high-gravity field. It then brings them to the Interstellar Transit Hub. You can also use this *deus ex machina* to save the Travellers if they get into trouble they cannot handle but only do this if there is no other way for them to continue this campaign.

DISEMBARKATION

Read the following to the Travellers:

The ship carries you through the portal. There is a moment of sickening discontinuity, like transitioning from jumpspace to real space but much more intense. You know, in the pit of your stomach, that you are somewhere… else. An external viewscreen shows that you are approaching a planet. You can make out a main sequence G-class star in the distance but there are no other stars – just a softly glowing milky void in every direction.

The Ancient ship drops into the atmosphere. You glimpse structures on the planet below, huge domes and monolithic shapes that must be bigger than mountains if you can make them out from this altitude. There is a shudder and a spherical object detaches from the ship and flies past. It is followed by another, and another. The ship is breaking up!

The ship is modular in design; the various pods are detaching and flying to their prearranged landing points. Admittedly, those landing zones were determined hundreds of thousands of years ago but the machines of the Ancients are nothing if not bloody-minded. The main deck of the Ancients ship, together with whichever capsules the Travellers are in, continues on its original course until it comes to land at a building that bears a remarkable resemblance to a starport.

If the *Star Hunter* is still functional, then a trio of buzzing spherical drones fly up from the starport and attach to the hull of the scout ship. They lift it out of the Ancients vessel and carry it over the horizon towards the ship graveyard outside the starport. The Travellers may be able to retrieve their ship in *The Death of Grandfather.*

The Travellers land at the abandoned starport – the first visitors in 50,000 years.

THE ABANDONED STARPORT

Form follows function. Different races have different conceptions of beauty, of technology, of architecture and aesthetics, and efficiency, but there are certain traits common to all docks. The Ancients starport is made from a dark grey substance that yields slightly to the touch but cannot be marked or cut by any weapon the Travellers can bring to bear, apart from a disintegrator pistol or the Ancients repair tool from the starship. There is one central structure, consisting of a tall tower overlooking a sprawling set of domes. Around this structure is a graveyard of ships and ship parts.

THE WRECKED SHIPS

The graveyard stretches in all directions for many kilometres. Most of the ships are Ancients in design, and look like larger or smaller versions of the ship encountered at Komesh – huge wedges or cylinders that are frames to support modular globes. Others are dedicated warships or couriers; these ships are even more geometric, lacking apertures or visible exterior markings. A close examination shows that the hulls are decorated with symbols visible only to creatures who can see ultraviolet light; the symbols are reminiscent of Droyne script. The ships are all non-functional, gutted hulks. Useful components and, in some cases, parts of the hull have been stripped. There are no useful relics here, no salvage to be stolen, just the tombs of starfaring giants.

If the Travellers explore the graveyard, they find signs of battle damage on some of the ships. The really dangerous battle damage was repaired or erased millennia ago, so the Travellers are not in danger of being devoured by hostile nanoswarms, getting dropped into pocket voids, or having their existence dissolved by reality-bleaching weapons, but there are burn marks and scars. Some of the hulls are dangerously radioactive. The blast patterns are similar to the damage inflicted on the Travellers' ship if they were hit in the orbit of Komesh.

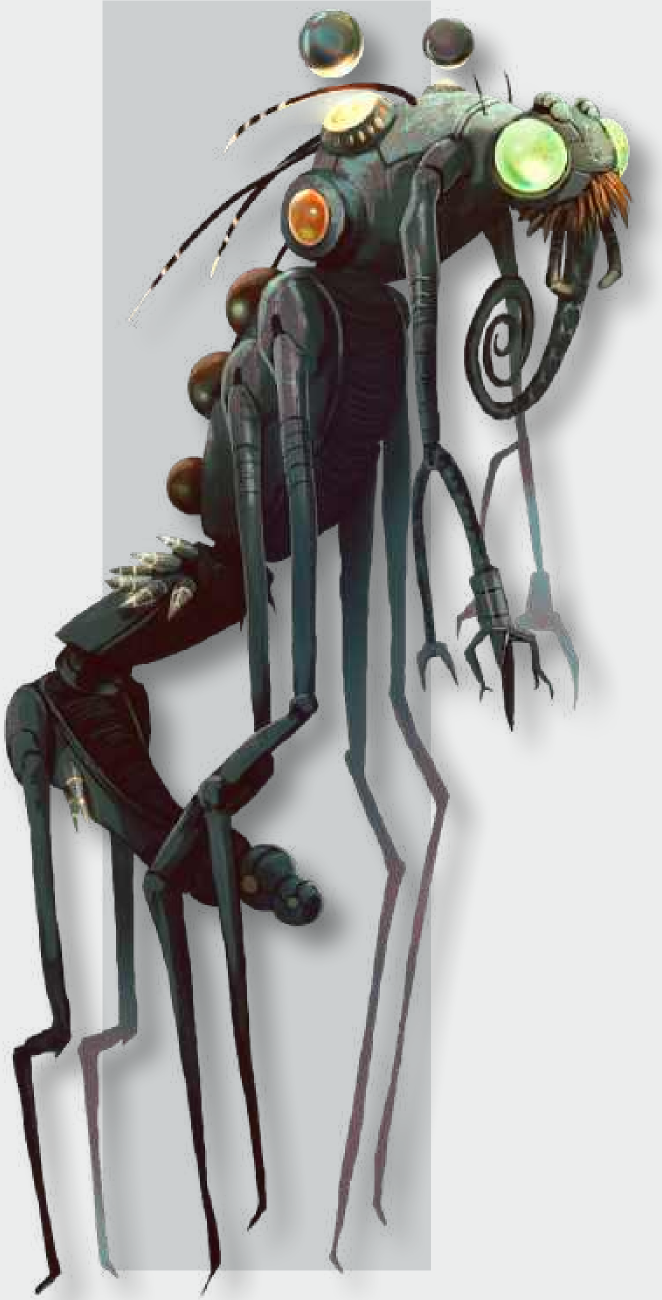
In the shadow of the titanic Ancients ships are other vessels, some of which are much more familiar. There are smaller ships of conventional design – traders dating back to the First Imperium, a Solomani scout ship, an Aslan hauler, a Zhodani courier and so on. Other ships are less familiar, but obviously of a much more modern vintage than the Ancients ships, all built in the last 5,000 years. Examining these ruined ships shows that they have been stripped of components that might decay over time but are otherwise intact. Unlike the Ancients hulks, these ships have been mothballed.

DISASSEMBLY ROBOTS

The Travellers are not alone in the starship graveyard. When pieces of their ship landed, disassembly robots were automatically activated for the first time in thousands of years. The robots' purpose is to disable any ships that land unless ordered not to do so. If the *Star Hunter* is still intact, then the robots intend to disable that ship too.

The robots resemble three-metre-long metal insects that flit back and forth on anti-gravity suspensors. They have long multi-purpose proboscises that are used to dissect and disassemble starships. Where necessary, the robots can detach parts of themselves and transform into smaller metallic crawlers or worms to get inside ships, or combine into larger robots to attack large components. The drones move with frightening speed and single-minded intensity, chittering to each other in bursts of informationally-dense noise.

Removed components are placed inside the robot's skeletal thorax for storage; they will later be processed or stored in the Graveyard (see page 128).



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Disassembly Robot	32	Grav Walker	6m	25+	Priceless
Skills	Melee (blade) 3, Mechanic 1, Recon 2				
Attacks	Cutting Tools (1D+4), Sonic Blast (automatic hit within 20m, no damage, DM-2 to all actions for 1D rounds if the targets have no ear protection)				
Manipulators	4 X (STR 12 DEX 12)				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+7), ATV, Flyer(idle), IR/UV Vision, Large (+1)				
Programming	Advanced (INT 9)				
Options	Auditory Sensor, Cutting Torch (advanced), Drone Interface, Mechanical Toolkit (advanced), PRIS Sensor, Recon Sensor (enhanced), Robotic Drone Controller (advanced), Storage Compartment (8 slots standard), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (small), Wireless Data Link				

They are programmed to ignore living beings under most circumstances. If the Travellers get too close to an active swarm, the robots attempt to drive them away by blocking their path and blasting them with painful sound or light bursts. If the Travellers persist, the robots fight back.

Exploring the Starport

The starport was designed to contain and funnel large numbers of people to the transit system underground. The port consists of a series of huge waiting rooms connected by airlocks, all leading towards the central chamber. The lights in each chamber automatically activate when the Travellers enter. The huge doors can be opened or closed with a touch but only one door in a chamber can be opened at a time – all of the Travellers have to enter a chamber and close the door behind them before the door at the far end of the chamber will open.

Each room is bare apart from hatches located some 10 metres up the sheer walls. If the Travellers find a way to climb up to the hatches, they discover they are locked.

To reach the central chamber, the Travellers need to pass through three airlocks. Each airlock has a specific function that triggers when used.

Airlock 1: A Bio-scanner determines the biological needs of the organisms and adjusts the atmosphere in the next room to compensate. This chamber is harmless unless there are several species among the Travellers, in which case the system is confused and interprets one of the Travellers as being a mutant. That Traveller is scanned by a high-power laser beam that illuminates every cell in their body in sequence; this is a disturbing experience but not actively harmful.

Airlock 2: The second airlock scans for equipment. Any cybernetics, weapons or other gear are detected and displayed as spinning holograms above the Travellers' heads. Any weapons are then disabled; electronics are fused, firing pins are melted and edged weapons are blasted full of microscopic holes making them soft as chalk. Electronic and firing pin damage can be repaired with a Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check (1D hours, INT). Alternatively, the Ilimdaki can repair any weapons up to TL10 with the resources they have on hand.

Airlock 3: The third airlock is designed to ensure that visitors are dispatched to the right holding area via the transit system. It scans the Travellers, comparing their genetic code, equipment and cultural signifiers to the database. Of course, seeing as the Travellers are not part of an Ancients-seeded culture that was current 300,000 years ago, they do not appear in the database. A hologram flashes up, displaying Seven habitats. All the habitats flash red as none are deemed suitable for the Travellers and the airlock doors refuse to open. The Travellers can use a disintegrator pistol or Ancients repair tool to force the doors open.

If they do not have such a device, they are stuck in the airlock for several minutes with no way to open the door. After a short time, one of the disassembly robots arrives on the far side and opens the door to 'process' the Travellers. They can dodge past it and enter the transit system.

THE TELEPORTER

At the centre of the starport is a circular chamber, in the middle of which is a huge semi-circle of silver light that slowly rotates around the vertical axis. This is a large-scale teleportation portal. When the Travellers enter the room, the teleporter is offline but it automatically activates as soon as they approach.

THE HUNTERS OF MEN

The proto-Vargr Hunters of Habitat 2 are the major threat in this section of the adventure. They start exploring the teleporter network soon after the Travellers do so. The Travellers may encounter the Hunters in any of the habitats but their biggest effect is in Habitat 0, where the Hunters attack the native human population. Unless the Travellers intervene, the Ilimdaki will be wiped out.

THE TRANSIT SYSTEM

The transit system on this part of the planet consists of a teleport network similar to the one on the ship. Again, each teleporter is assigned a binary code that can be entered into a control panel.

Currently, the teleporter is set to teleport to zone 0. The two final codes are locked out – the only way to access the Custodian is by going cross-country and the Travellers cannot return to the spaceport once they leave it.

Habitats	Binary Code	Description
0	000	The Ilimdaki
1	001	The Maker
2	010	The Hunters
3	011	The Hungry Swamp
4	100	Graveyard
5	101	Deathzone
6	110	The Custodian
7	111	Back to the spaceport

THE HABITATS

The teleporter leads to seven different habitats, zones on the planet's surface assigned to one experiment or another. Natural barriers of various kinds, such as rivers, thick forests or treacherous mountains divide most of the habitats from each other. Habitat 6 is contained in an environmentally-controlled dome.

Beyond Habitat 6 is another dome, the Interstellar Transit Hub. This hub is the Travellers' best way off the planet.

Unless otherwise noted, the habitat environment is Earth-like and temperate, with fertile green fields, forests and rolling hills. Travellers who have visited the Darrian Confederation notice the resemblance between the habitats and the Orchards of Darrian; the habitats are not quite so idyllic but are certainly engineered environments made to be as pleasant and self-sustaining as possible. The planets and animals are mostly descendants of Earth flora and fauna.

- **The Ilimdaki:** A new subrace of Humaniti created by Grandfather; they have an inherited, instinctive understanding of technology but are incapable of innovating.
- **The Maker:** A cloning facility for producing new batches of experimental subjects.
- **The Hunters:** A new subrace of Vargr, more feral and dangerous.
- **The Hungry Swamp:** A living weapons system made to erase failed experiments.
- **Graveyard:** A wasteland of junked experiments and spare parts.
- **Deathzone:** A forest of incredibly hostile creatures.
- **The Custodian:** The Droyne robot assigned to oversee these habitats.

TRAVELLING BETWEEN HABITATS

The Travellers can travel between different habitats either via teleporters or by travelling cross-country. Moving between habitats requires a Difficult (10+) Navigation check (1D hours, INT) to avoid running into trouble. If this check is failed, then the Travellers waste another 2D hours backtracking, fighting through difficult terrain or sheltering from harsh weather.

Remember to keep the pressure of time on the Travellers. If they squander half a day wandering from habitat-to-habitat, they will see the portal to the real universe glowing a threatening blue in the milky night sky.

TELEPORTERS

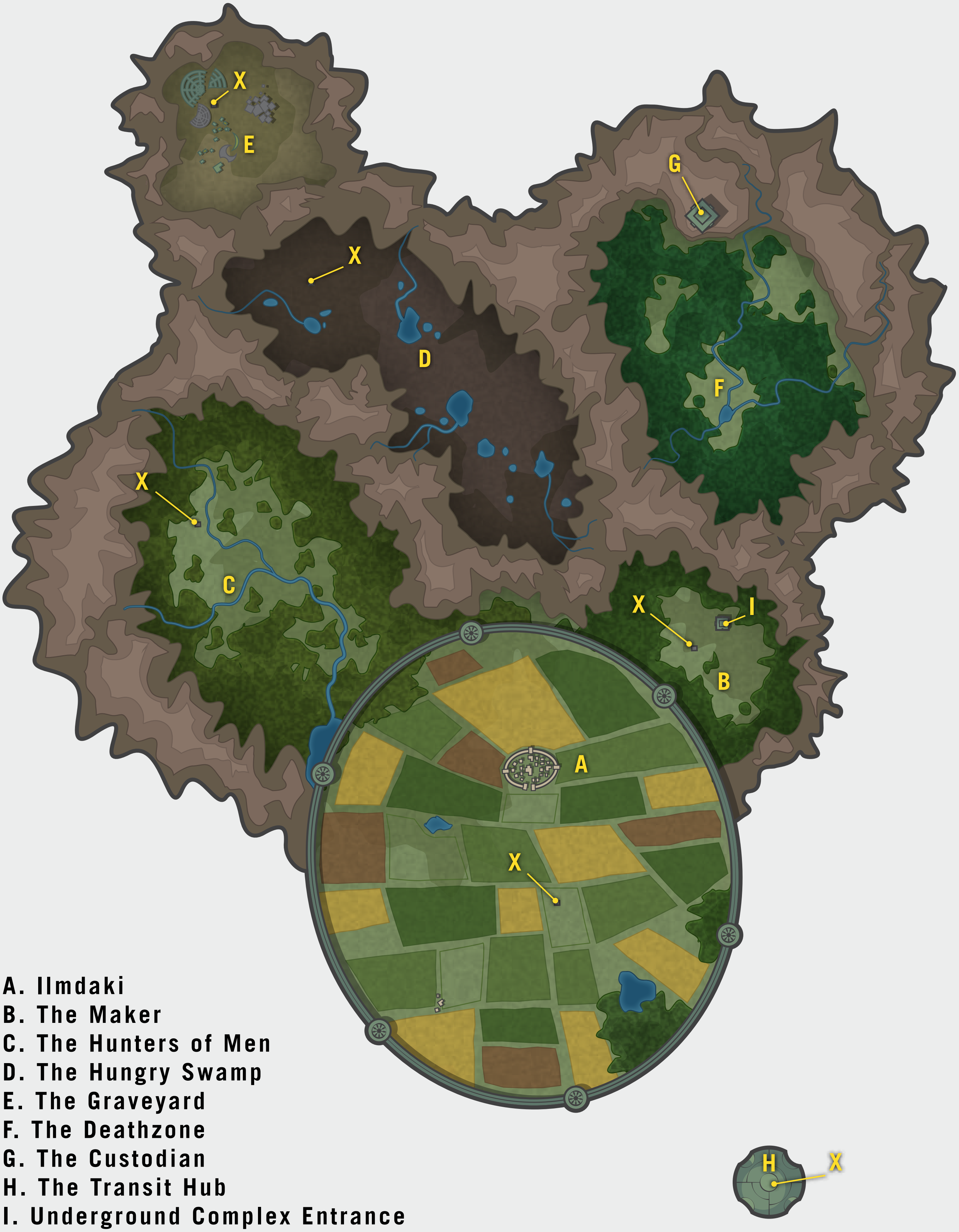
There is a teleporter in the centre of each of the seven habitats. These seven teleporters are identical to the one in the centre of the starport – a huge rotating portal. A small citadel surrounds each teleporter; thousands of years ago, Grandfather's servants used these citadels to monitor the ongoing experiments. These days, Grandfather's attention is elsewhere and the citadels are abandoned.

REFEREE ADVICE

This section of the adventure plays on the relationship that the Ancients have to other species. Humaniti is just an accidental by-product of Ancients experiments. Other races are nothing to Grandfather and his offspring; our survival or happiness is not their concern. Play up the bizarre horror of the Ilimdaki and the Hunters, and the indifference of the Custodian at the end of the section. Although Seven is a more direct threat to the Travellers, that does not mean that Grandfather is their ally or benefactor. They are nothing more than temporarily useful tools to him.

While events can play out differently depending on the route the Travellers take through the teleporters, the most likely scenario is that they initially make contact with the Ilimdaki; they have an audience with the Queen but are interrupted by word of a Hunter attack around the teleporter. The Travellers then either lead an attack to retake the teleporter citadel, or else abandon the Ilimdaki to their fate and set off in search of the Interstellar Transit Hub or a way of stopping the Hunters.

THE HABITATS



A. Ilmdaki
B. The Maker
C. The Hunters of Men
D. The Hungry Swamp
E. The Graveyard
F. The Deathzone
G. The Custodian
H. The Transit Hub
I. Underground Complex Entrance
X. Teleporter

To ensure that the various experiments do not use the teleporters without permission, the teleporter system shuts down when the starport or Interstellar Transit Hub is not in use. When the Ancients ship arrived at the starport, it activated the teleporter network for the first time in millennia. The network will shut down again if no-one uses the teleporters within a four-hour period.

The Travellers are not the only ones who use the teleporters. Soon after the Travellers start exploring the habitats, the hostile Hunters discover the reactivated network and use it to bypass the Ilimdaki's defences. A host of vicious killers teleport into the middle of the Ilimdaki habitat and attacks.

THE ILIMDAKI HABITAT

Via Teleporter: The Teleport Citadel is located on a hilltop in the middle of farmlands south of Yas. From the citadel, the Travellers can see well-kept farmlands and small villages all around, and even spot human figures toiling in the fields. The Ilimdaki have very limited curiosity – they obviously see the Travellers arriving but ignore them unless spoken to first.

Via Cross-Country: If the Travellers approach the Wall from the far side, they will be shot at by Ilimdaki soldiers (DM+1 to attack rolls, 3D-3 damage). The Travellers can freely enter the Ilimdaki habitat by any other route.

The Referee is advised to review the Ilimdaki section on page 134 before running this part of the adventure.

AARSHUR

One of the first Ilimdaki that the Travellers meet is Aarshur, a young farmer and soldier. He wears a well-made leather jack and has a rifle slung across his back. The rifle is exceptionally well-balanced and accurate. He hesitantly greets the Travellers if they make contact with him and asks if they are in need of food. If they accept his offer, he takes them to the nearest village; if they refuse, he assumes that their interaction is at an end and returns to his work until the Travellers question him again.

Aarshur, like all Ilimdaki, is technologically adept. If given the opportunity to examine the Travellers' equipment, he can quickly identify an item's purpose and principle of operation. Play up the incongruity of this primitive farmer instinctively knowing how, say, a laser pistol or hand computer works. From Aarshur's perspective, the Travellers are incomprehensibly or wilfully foolish. Not being able to tell what a device does is like not knowing when you are hungry or that fire burns.

If the Travellers ask to be taken to a leader, Aarshur accompanies them to the city of Yas, a journey of one hour by steam-car. During the journey, the Travellers see the great wall that protects the habitat from external attack. Once the Travellers arrive in Yas, they are taken to meet Queen Nalu and her vizier, Irkur.

AARSHUR/GENERIC ILIMDAKI

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Ilimdaki	Male	29

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	3	Animals (handling) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee 0, Persuade 0, Profession (farming) 1, Survival 1
DEX	7	EDU	11	
END	7	SOC	5	
EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Antique Rifle (3D-3) **Armour:** Leather Jack (+1)			

Playing Aarshur:

- Be blandly pleasant, innocent and helpful.
- Treat the Travellers as if they are interesting but obviously deficient in many ways. Most Ilimdaki do not consider imagination to be a desirable trait. Change is not something one strives for.
- Examine any technological devices you can get your hands on but never in an enthusiastic or interested way. Play it as an unconscious nervous tic.

THE QUEEN OF RIFLES

Queen Nalu greets the Travellers and asks where they came from. Were they sent by the Maker? Historical records say that when the Ilimdaki were born, 500 years ago, they came here by means of the teleporter. Irkur also questions them, assuming that they are fresh clones created by the Maker machine.

Ambitious and unscrupulous Travellers can easily convince the Ilimdaki to serve them. Having 50,000 easy dominated technological geniuses at your beck and call is a wonderful feeling. Queen Nalu even encourages this sort of behaviour – the Ilimdaki need external drives if they are to develop and she can see that the Travellers have far more imagination than any of her subjects. This puts the Travellers into direct conflict with her advisor, Irkur, who is threatened by their arrival.

QUEEN NALU

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Ilimdaki	Female	44

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	4	Carouse 2, Deception 1, Diplomat 2, Leadership 2, Persuade 1
DEX	7	EDU	12	
END	7	SOC	15	

Playing Nalu:

- Be manipulative in an obvious way. She is trying but does not understand subtlety.
- She cares for her people and will do anything to protect them against the Hunters.
- Impress upon the Travellers that her approval is vital if they are to be trusted by the Ilimdaki.

IRKUR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Ilimdaki	Male	43

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	4	Carouse 3, Deception 2, Diplomat 3, Leadership 1, Persuade 2, Steward 2
DEX	6	EDU	12	
END	9	SOC	14	

Playing Irkur:

- Remember: tradition is good! Change is bad! The Maker made this land to nurture the Ilimdaki – everything is perfect in the habitat.
- These imaginative outsiders are much more like Hunters than ordinary people. The safest thing to do is banish them beyond the Wall.

DEALING WITH THE ILIMDAKI

Gathering Information: The Ilimdaki rarely leave their homelands but have a vague idea of the contents of the other habitats. They are also aware of the existence of the Interstellar Transit Hub but have no idea where it is. If the Ilimdaki ever reached the Graveyard (Habitat 4), they could repair many of the discarded Ancients weapons.

Improving Technology: The Travellers can easily increase the TL of the Ilimdaki to TL5 or 6 in 1D days; further progress requires the construction of a more complex industrial base. The Ilimdaki can do it but the Travellers have to direct them every step of the way.

War Preparations: If the Travellers lead the defence against the Hunters, the Ilimdaki can be ordered to produce several useful new technologies with their genetic memory, such as:

- **Field telephones:** Wired telephone communications strung along the Wall can give the Travellers early warning of Hunter attacks.
- **Observation balloons:** Spot Hunters, snipe from the air or sail across the sky to avoid Hunters and dangerous terrain.
- **Landmines, electric fences:** More tools for holding off Hunters.
- **Poison gas:** Eliminating the Hunter problem once and for all.

ARRIVAL OF THE HUNTERS

The Hunters arrive via the teleporter network at a suitable dramatic juncture. Unless the Travellers rally the Ilimdaki and lead the defence of Yas, the city is swiftly overrun by packs of savage Hunters. Any technologies that the Travellers have introduced to Ilimdaki culture are rapidly reverse-engineered and captured by the Hunters.

If the Travellers get involved in the war, the easiest way to resolve battles is with the Tactics (military) skill. Give the Travellers DM+1 if they have working high-tech weapons and another DM+1 if the Ilimdaki are using superior technology. The difficulty of the check depends on the weight of numbers, as shown on the Tactics Check table. If the Travellers do nothing to affect the populations, the Ilimdaki start with 50,000 individuals and the Hunters begin with 5,000.

Tactics Check

Ilimdaki/Hunter Ratio	Difficulty
100:1	Easy (4+)
25:1	Routine (6+)
10:1	Average (8+)
5:1	Difficult (10+)
2:1	Very Difficult (12+)
1:1	Formidable (14+)
1:2 or worse	Impossible (16+)

THE MAKER

Via Teleporter: The teleporter brings the Travellers to an open meadow. The grass is short enough to suggest it was recently mowed and smooth enough to be used for lawn bowls. A short distance away from the teleporter citadel is another structure, the entrance to an underground complex.

Via Cross-Country: As above but the Travellers encounter the metal insects while still in the surrounding woodland.

Shortly after the Travellers arrive in this habitat, buzzing insects swarm around them. These insects resemble small mosquitos; a close examination of an insect shows that it is a tiny metal robot, not a natural creature. If the Travellers are not wearing full-body protective gear like vacc suits, the insects land on exposed skin and take blood samples. After taking a sample, the insects fly into the underground complex.

THE CLONING MACHINE

The underground complex is one half of a reset system for Grandfather's experiments. Several of the habitats contain old experiments to create new forms of servants. Grandfather sought to breed a perfect laboratory assistant. In his trials, he experimented on Humaniti (giving rise to subspecies like the Florani), the Vargr, his own Droyne, various other modified and wholly synthetic species, and – disastrously – clones of himself, before turning to robots. The structure is a huge cloning machine, capable of producing fresh batches of the various populations. Whenever the primal Vargr in Habitat 2 wipe out the humans in Habitat 0, the Cloning Machine can produce replacements.

The metal insects encountered outside are the machine's sensor network. They take genetic samples and carry them into the cloning banks.

Inside, the machine consists of a labyrinth of narrow vaulted corridors, lined with artificial wombs. These amniotic chambers can fast-grow a clone from a genetic sample to an infant within 10 hours, cramming a month of growth into every hour using variations on slow drugs. By adjusting the controls at each womb, it is possible to grow a clone to any desired age, from infancy to maturity to senility.

If the Travellers were bitten by the insects outside, then their genetic material was added to the banks. Whenever the machine produces a new batch of clones (say, if the Hunters of Men wipe out the Ilimdaki), then copies of the Travellers will also be created. If a Traveller is killed during this section of the adventure, then they may be replaced by a clone.

THE PRIEST

The Ilimdaki have come to worship the cloning machine as a deity. Their genetic inability to innovate means their 'religion' is a poorly developed one. They have appointed a priest to watch over the machine and placate it with offerings.

If the Travellers explore the Cloning Machine, they encounter the priest deep in the cloning chambers. He is an aged, white-haired human, dressed in grey robes who introduces himself as Shedin, the high priest of the Maker. Unlike the unscrupulous Irkur, Shedin genuinely believes there is a beneficial and kindly presence behind the Cloning Machine.

For an Ilimdaki, Shedin is inquisitive and imaginative. He can tell the Travellers about neighbouring habitats, including the contents of Habitat 3.

SHEDIN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Ilimdaki	Male	74

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	5	Carouse 1, Deception 1, Persuade 2, Survival 1
DEX	4	EDU	12	
END	4	SOC	10	

Playing Shedin:

- These strangers are doubtless agents of the Maker – ask them for religious revelation.
- Have a sense of childlike wonder about the universe.

THE HUNTERS OF MEN

The Hunter territory is a war-torn wilderness. It looks superficially similar to the bucolic countryside of the Ilimdaki habitat, albeit with more small forests and wild grasslands than farms, however there are hidden dangers here. The Hunters have seeded their habitat with thousands of cunning traps; as soon as the Travellers arrive, the Hunters catch their scent and will kill them if they can.

Via Teleporter: Arriving via teleporter means the Travellers run straight into a Hunter attack. As soon as the teleport network reactivated, the Hunters worked out what it was and how to use it. There are dozens of Hunters in the woods around the teleporter. Some are waiting for victims to come through the portal; others are observing their rivals or planning their next move.

Via Cross-Country: If the Travellers approach from Habitat 0, they run into Hunters in the woods almost immediately – the Hunters keep a close watch on the Wall, looking for weaknesses. Other cross-country routes are unguarded.

HUNTER ENCOUNTERS

The Hunters are unrelentingly hostile at first, unless the Travellers have an overwhelming technological advantage. Roll 2D when travelling through Hunter territory for a random encounter.

Hunter Territory Encounters

2D	Encounter
2 or less	Hunter household
3–4	Stalked
5–7	Trap
8–9	Sniper
10–11	Hunter pack
12 or more	Hunter host

DM-2 if the Travellers are heavily armed, accompanied by many guards or otherwise obviously dangerous. DM+2 if the Travellers are lightly armed, few in number, wounded or lost.

Hunter household: The Travellers find a fortified Hunter homestead, consisting of a small house or lair surrounded by defensive embankments and traps. The owner has fled the household but is watching the Travellers from nearby.

Stalked: The Travellers are followed by a Hunter; the Hunter does not attack immediately but waits for an opportunity to do so.

Trap: A random Traveller runs into a trap. If any Traveller has Recon 2+, or if the Travellers stated they are taking precautions, then an Average (8+) Recon check lets the Travellers detect the trap. Otherwise, roll 1D on the Traps table.

Traps

1D	Trap
1	Pit Trap. One Traveller must make a Difficult (10+) DEX check or fall, suffering 2D damage.
2	Swinging log. Roll 2D; the log hits a Traveller on an 8+ and inflicts 3D damage.
3	Snare. Roll 2D; the snare hits a Traveller on a 5+ and suspends them five metres in the air. The Traveller is stuck until rescued.
4	Poison darts. Roll 2D, subtracting a Traveller's Protection from the roll. On an 8+, the Traveller is poisoned and must make an Average (8+) END check or fall unconscious and lose 2D DEX.
5	Landmine. Roll 2D; the mine is triggered on an 8+ and inflicts 4D damage to one Traveller and 2D to the others.
6	Explosive tripwire. One Traveller must make a Difficult (10+) DEX check or all Travellers suffer 4D damage.

Sniper: A lone Hunter in the trees fires on the Travellers. The Hunter keeps sniping at them; if they pursue, he tries to lead them into a trap.

Hunter Pack: The Travellers are attacked by 1D+2 Hunters.

Hunter Host: The Travellers are attacked by 3D+3 Hunters.

FIRST AMONG HUNTERS

If the Travellers try negotiating with a Hunter, the first they encounter is First Among Hunters (all Hunters have similarly grandiose names, when they bother with naming themselves at all). She is a typical Hunter – a genius-level intellect coupled with savage instincts and overwhelming paranoia. First Among Hunters applies her intelligence to winning the confidence and trust of the Travellers. She learns their language by osmosis, then plays on their curiosity and fears by offering to guide them through Hunter territory. She will betray the Travellers if it benefits her but has no loyalty to the other Hunters either.

The Hunters know about all the other Habitats but have never been able to reach the Graveyard (Habitat 4) or get past the Custodian in Habitat 6.

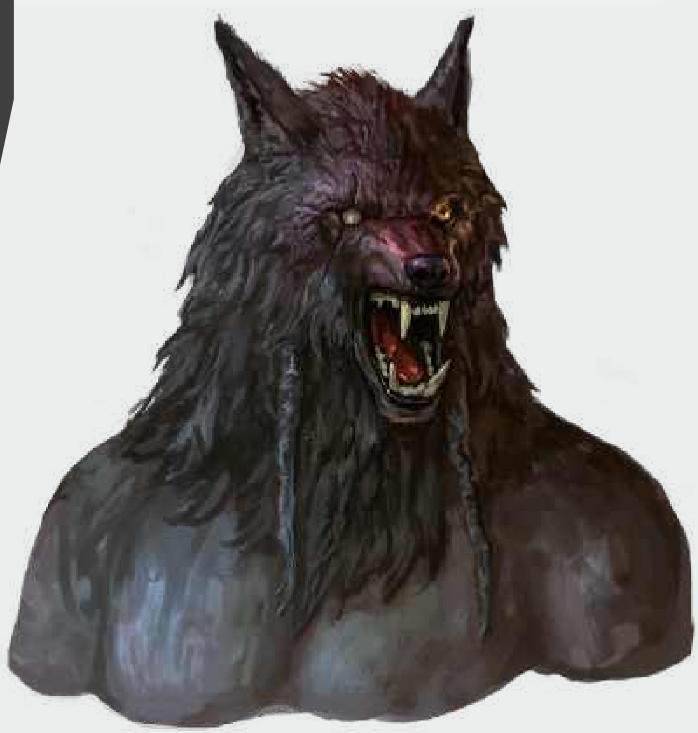
TYPICAL HUNTER

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Hunter	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	15	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Mechanic 3, Melee (natural) 2, Recon 4, Stealth 3, Survival 4
DEX	9	EDU	3	
END	9	SOC	7	
EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Antique Rifle (3D-3) **Armour:** Jack (+1)			

Playing First Among Hunters:

- Look at the Travellers like they are potential meals.
- In conversation, interrupt and skip ahead as much as possible.
- Ask insightful questions; it is permissible to use out-of-character knowledge for the Hunter if it helps reinforce the sense of her intelligence and sensitivity.



THE HUNGRY SWAMP

Via Teleporter: The teleporter citadel is located on a small island in the swamp.

Via Cross-Country: The Travellers have to cross the jagged hills surrounding the swamp. The journey is arduous but not especially dangerous. Travellers with Survival or Science (planetology) recognise that this is an artificial environment; the hills were deliberately constructed to contain the swamp.

LIFE'S RESET BUTTON

The Hungry Swamp is a fetid, yellow-tinged mire that stretches for as far as the Travellers can see. The maroon-coloured mud stinks of acid and the fog that hangs above the swamp burns their skin and eyes. If the Travellers analyse the swamp mud with Science (biology), they discover its composition is alarmingly similar to the contents of stomach acid.

Parts of the swamp are more acidic than others. At the upper edges of the swamp, Travellers find the mud painful to touch, but not damaging. Deeper in the swamp, the mud deals 1 damage per round of contact; immersion in the water inflicts 1D damage per round.

Lurking in the depths of the swamp are a breed of nameless creatures, amphibious squid-like monsters that did not evolve naturally but were engineered by Grandfather aeons ago. They are designed as living weapons. When activated, they rise up and squirm into a target habitat, killing everything and dragging the remains back to the swamp. The swamp is their digestive system. The corpses are dissolved by the acidic mud and the creatures absorb the nutrients.

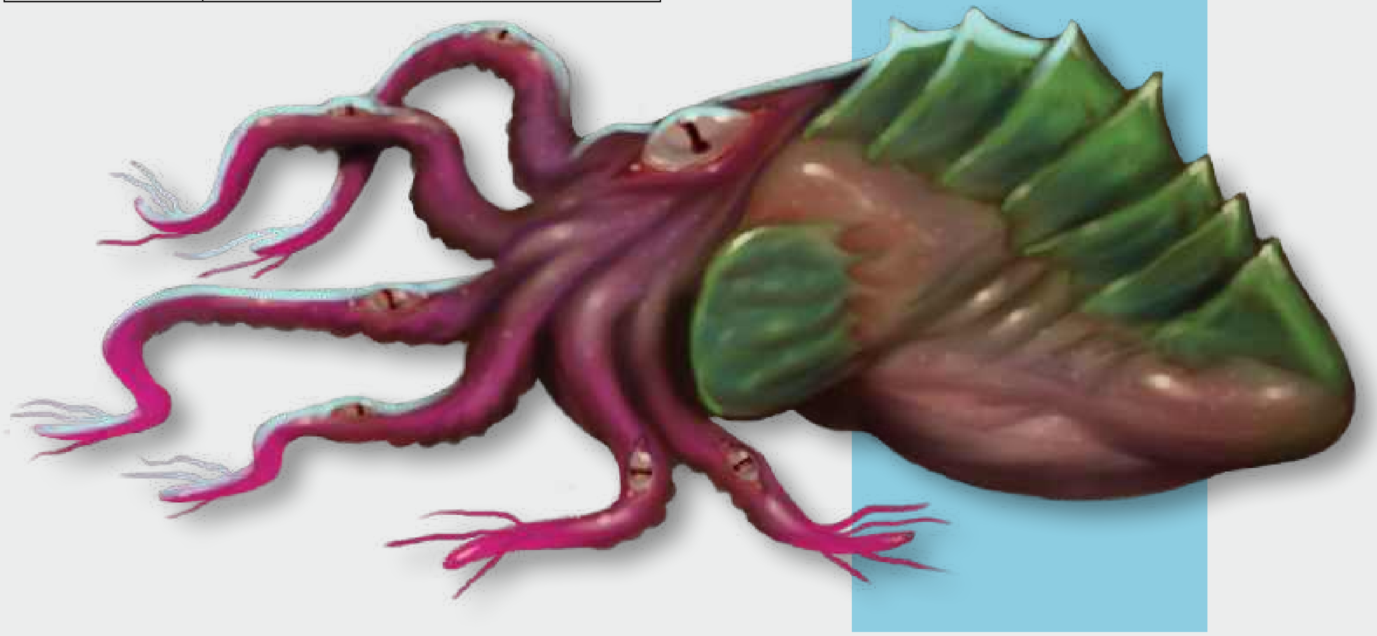
The creatures are made to be thorough above all else. The squid-creatures are four metres long and strong enough to rip through steel plate but are surprisingly gentle. Their dextrous tentacles are tipped with thousands of extensible cilia, allowing them to manipulate objects less than a centimetre wide and wide saucer-shaped eyespots that dot each tentacle and their central mass.

TRAVELLING THROUGH THE SWAMP

The squid are normally quiescent but the activation of the teleportation network put them into standby mode. For a giant amphibious carnivorous squid, 'standby' translates to 'floating just under the surface of the acidic swamp and attacking anyone nearby'. Travellers moving through the swamp may be ambushed by the squid.

Nameless Creature

Animal	Hits	Speed
Swamp Squid	40	8m
Skills	Melee 0, Recon 4, Stealth 2, Survival 3	
Attacks	Tentacle (3D)	
Traits	Armour (+8), Large (+2)	
Behaviour	Omnivore, Filter	



A Difficult (10+) Recon check lets the Travellers spot the squid lurking under the stagnant acid. Otherwise, the squid surprises them.

CONTROLLING THE SWAMP

A short distance from the teleport citadel is another structure, used to control the swamp and its denizens. The structure resembles a pumping station or perhaps a fossilised octopus. If the Travellers explore the structure, they find an Ancients control console. Extensive experimentation or unfortunate accident lets the Travellers trigger the controls.

Activating the Control System: Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check (1Dx10 minutes, INT)
Understanding the Control System: Computers + Education, Very Hard (-6), 1–6 months Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (computers) check (1D months, EDU)

The console controls two major functions – it alters the level of the swamp and commands the squid creatures. If the Travellers activate the control system, roll on the Controls table to determine what they achieve.

Controls

1D	Effect
1	**Raising the swamp:** The swamp level rises, engulfing any high ground and small islands. The teleport citadel is flooded. The underground structure seals itself, trapping the Travellers inside until they lower the swamp waters again.
2	**Lowering the swamp:** The acidic waters drain away. The Travellers can now easily cross the swamp without being ambushed.
3	**Deactivate squid:** The squid return to slumber.
4	**Squid target the Ilimdaki:** A host of squid squirm out of the swamp and attack Habitat 0. The Ilimdaki weapons are useless against the creatures, so the habitat is swiftly overrun.
5	**Squid target the Hunters:** A host of squid attack the Hunters. The Hunters are better able to evade the squid but still get wiped out in a matter of hours
6	**Indiscriminate squid:** The squid attack everyone, including the Travellers.

GRAVEYARD

Via Teleporter: The teleporter citadel is on a rise overlooking the graveyard. Stepping through the teleporter immediately attracts the attention of scavenger drones.

Via Cross-Country: A track leads out of the acidic swamp up to the Graveyard. It is obvious that something huge once crawled out of the swamp and dragged itself up the hillside – this track was made by the squid host in centuries past, when they dragged salvage from a previous iteration of the Hunter civilisation up to be recycled.

ANCIENT EXPERIMENTS

The Graveyard is a recycling facility for Grandfather's abandoned experiments. Potentially dangerous or troublesome experiments are dumped here, to be demolished by recycling robots. The Graveyard is a desert of bleached-white sand. Strange machines and relics poke like the bones of dinosaurs out of the dunes. There is no sign of life, no movement, nothing but the shifting sands. The ground crunches with each footstep, as the sand is dotted with microcircuits and discarded parts.

Exploring the graveyard, the Travellers come across several semi-functional Ancients artefacts.

Cloning Facility: This is a cloning facility similar to the Maker machine encountered in Habitat 1 but it has been partially demolished. In several places, the walls have broken open and hives of dying metal insects spill out onto the sands. If the Travellers tamper with the device, it produces non-viable fast-grown clones of them.

Artificial Intelligence: Grandfather built many artificial intelligences of varying complexity, not all of which performed according to their original specifications. This nameless, insane AI is contained in a pyramidal structure. The AI is a free-floating sphere of dense computronium, which communicates through radio transmissions. The AI monitors the Travellers' radio messages, if any, and attempts to contact them by sending messages. Initially, it broadcasts messages in old Vilani and Oynprith but switches to Galanglic once it parses that language.

The AI is insane, babbling about random topics from its memory banks. It describes events during the Final Wars, the threat of the Sons and how Grandfather discarded it. It is bitter and resentful towards Grandfather, claiming he inevitably discards all his creations and that he will never achieve his goal, yet will destroy the universe in making the attempt.

Gravity Field: This is a field of scattered aluminium bars, coloured a variety of shades. The gravity in this field is strangely warped. In places, there is no gravity; in others, the force of gravity exceeds 30g. Changes in gravity are visible as atmospheric distortions.

Telepathic Pillar: This is an unmarked pillar of white metal. Travellers who come within 10 metres of the pillar feel a sense of mounting euphoria, coupled with a buzzing noise in their ears and tooth pain. Travellers who come within three metres of the pillar are overwhelmed by joy and must make a Difficult (10+) INT test to drag themselves away. This test can be repeated after 1D hours, when the Traveller's growing thirst distracts them from the wonders of the pillar.

Dimensional Fold: This is a block of green matter, marked with extremely complex geometrical features. It is surrounded by a three-metre-radius circle of perfectly smooth sand. Any Traveller who crosses the circle's edge appears on the far side, as do any objects thrown into the circle. Effectively, only energy can cross through the circle but any matter is teleported to the far side. Experimenting with the circle is hazardous – if you try inserting a long rod or other object that is partially in and partially out of the circle, the fold ends up disintegrating part of the offending item.

Null Zone: The null zone is a scattering of small black discs on the desert floor, which cannot be moved by the Travellers. Items within the zone are drained of energy. Electronic devices and batteries are drained first, at the rate of one item per round. Once all powered items are drained, the zone starts sapping the Travellers. Travellers in the null zone lose 1D END per round. Once END hits 0, the field drains STR and finally INT. Once Intelligence hits 0, the Traveller dies.

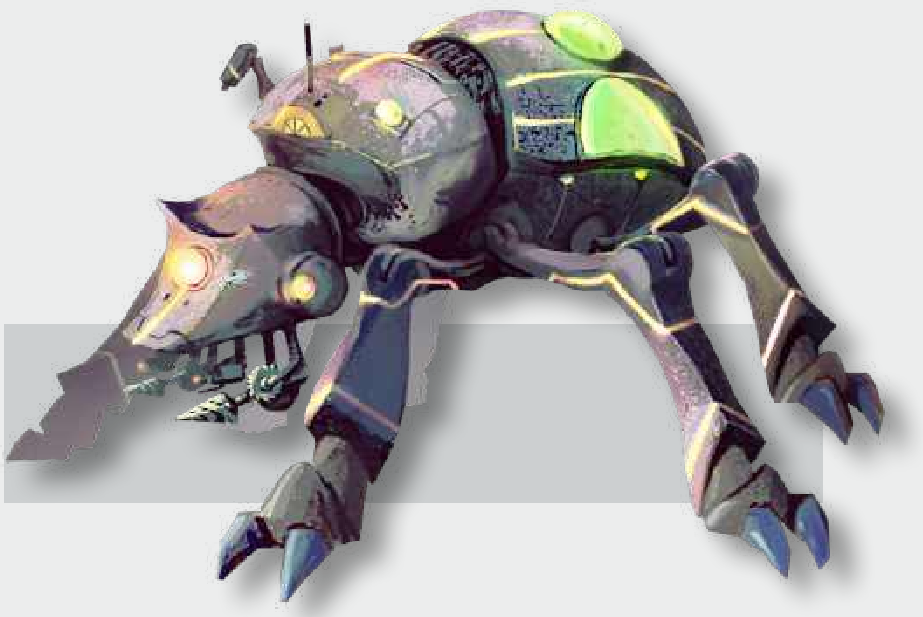
SALVAGING EQUIPMENT

There are no intact Ancients machines here but some of the devices can be repaired with sufficient knowledge. None of the Travellers are capable of this but the Ilimdaki can do so if they bring some of the technosavants here.

The Ilimdaki can assemble items of up to TL14 from the spare parts here – anything from power armour to flying tanks to weapons (nothing larger than 30 tons). Assume it takes 1D hours to find the needed spare parts and add one hour to the time required for each subsequent item. Adding more Ilimdaki workers does not decrease the time it takes to find spare parts but lets the Ilimdaki assemble more devices at once.

SCAVENGER DRONES

The scavenger drones are large counterparts of the disassembly robots encountered at the starport, resembling huge metallic dung beetles. Instead of mandibles, the drones have an array of drills, saws, lasers, plasma cutters and other tools. They bore into discarded machinery, pushing their wedge-shaped heads into the wreckage and pulling it apart. The rear thorax of the drone contains specialised tools for different tasks, as well as a factory for making swarms of smaller copies of the drones for dealing with small objects.



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Scavenger Drone	65	Grav Walker	8m	25+	Priceless

Skills	Athletics (strength) 3, Mechanic 1, Melee (blade) 4, Recon 2
Attacks	Cutting Tools (3D+12)
Manipulators	4 X (STR 15 DEX 15)
Endurance	Unlimited
Traits	Armour (+25), ATV, Flyer (idle), IR/UV Vision, Large (+2)
Programming	Advanced (INT 9)
Options	Auditory Sensor, Cutting Torch (advanced), Drone Interface, Fabrication Chamber (8 slots advanced), Mechanical Toolkit (advanced), PRIS Sensor, Recon Sensor (enhanced), Robotic Drone Controller (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (small), Wireless Data Link

DEATHZONE

Via Teleporter: The teleporter citadel is overgrown. The Travellers appear in the middle of thorny vines and underbrush, and have to cut their way free.

Via Cross-Country: The Deathzone is at the bottom of a deep depression, so the approach to the habitat involves climbing down steep cliffs. The air grows noticeably thicker as the Travellers descend with a much higher partial pressure of oxygen. Travellers with Science (planetology) can tell this is not a natural phenomenon.

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

This habitat contains a selection of extremely dangerous plants and animal species. Millennia ago, Grandfather toyed with using natural selection to test his genetically engineered creations. Prospective species were dumped into this incredibly testing environment; if they survived, that genetic line was deemed worth continuing. The original Deathzone was destroyed during the Final Wars but samples were transplanted to this hellish garden.

To ensure the creatures of the Deathzone did not overwhelm the other habitats, Grandfather engineered a dependence on a high level of oxygen. Both plants and animals in the Deathzone perish if removed from the high-oxygen area. Machines hidden in the jungle pump out extra oxygen to maintain the correct environment.

The Hunters know the terrain of the Deathzone moderately well but never managed to get past the Spitting Hedge. The Ilimdaki never dared enter the Deathzone.

TRAVELLING THROUGH THE DEATHZONE

Travellers moving through the Deathzone will almost certainly be attacked. Roll on the Deathzone Encounters table. A successful Difficult (10+) Recon check (INT) allows the Travellers to re-roll the encounter but they are bound by the effects of the second roll.

Deathzone Encounters

2D	Encounter
2–3	Hunters
4–5	Howlers
6	Ant Swarm
7–8	Spitter
9	Oxygen Generator
10–11	Avian Flock
12	Acid Fog
13	D3 Spitters
14	Tender Robot
15+	Spitting Hedge

DMs: +1 for each previous encounter
+1 if the Travellers have Navigation 2+
+1 if the Travellers have Survival 2+
+4 if the Travellers arrived via the teleporter

Hunters: The Travellers encounter 1D+2 Hunters.

Ant Swarm: The carnivorous ants of the Deathzone devour everything in their path. Flesh, wood, leaves, bones – anything organic gets consumed by the marching swarm, suffering 2D damage per round. Sealed armour provides complete protection against swarm attacks.

Oxygen Generator: The Travellers happen upon one of the oxygen generators that maintain the environment. It looks like a collection of wide-mouthed pipes, made of a white stone and covered in blue moss and mould.

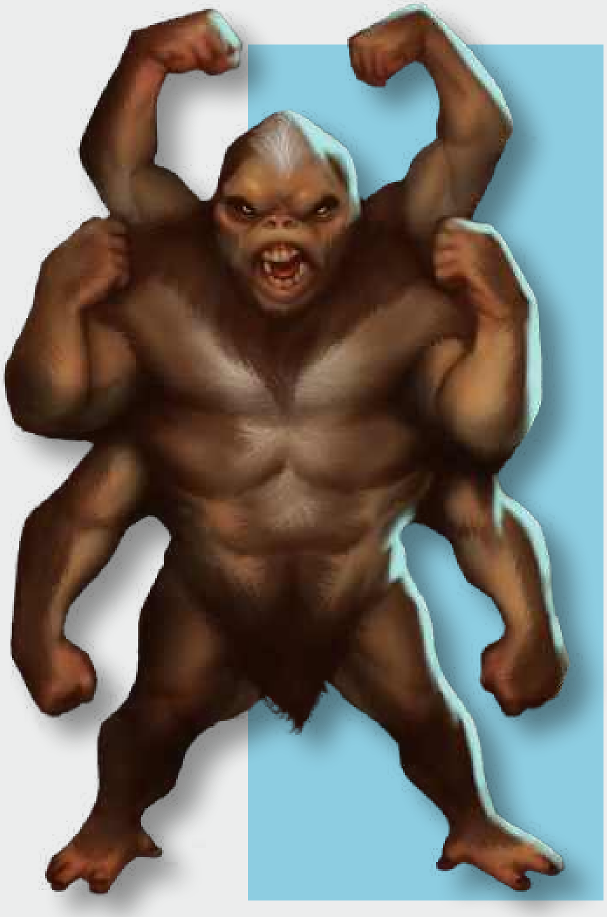
Acid Fog: The acidic fog is secreted by a relative of the spitter, in patches stretching for up to a kilometre at a time. The plants migrate slowly through the forest, killing everything in their path on their long circuitous migrations. An acid fog patch inflicts 1 damage per round; armour is degraded at the rate of one point every 10 rounds. On average, it takes 2Dx10 rounds to pass through a fog patch. Only sealed suits provide any protection against the fog.

Tender Robot: The Deathzone is maintained by large automated robot guardians. These vehicles crawl through the woods, repairing damaged oxygen generators and keeping the ecosystem balanced. The robots ignore the Travellers.

Howler

Howlers are six-armed primates created to be as aggressive and dangerous as possible. They attack other living creatures on sight. In addition to their considerable physical strength, howlers have offensive psionic powers. They have a group consciousness and their PSI is equal to twice the number of howlers in the pack. Howler packs consist of 2D+4 individuals.

Animal	Hits	Speed
Howler	26	8m
Skills	Athletics (endurance) 2, Athletics (strength) 2, Melee (natural) 2, Recon 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Telepathy 4	
Attacks	Claws (1D+2)	
Traits	Heightened Senses, Large (+1)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Killer	

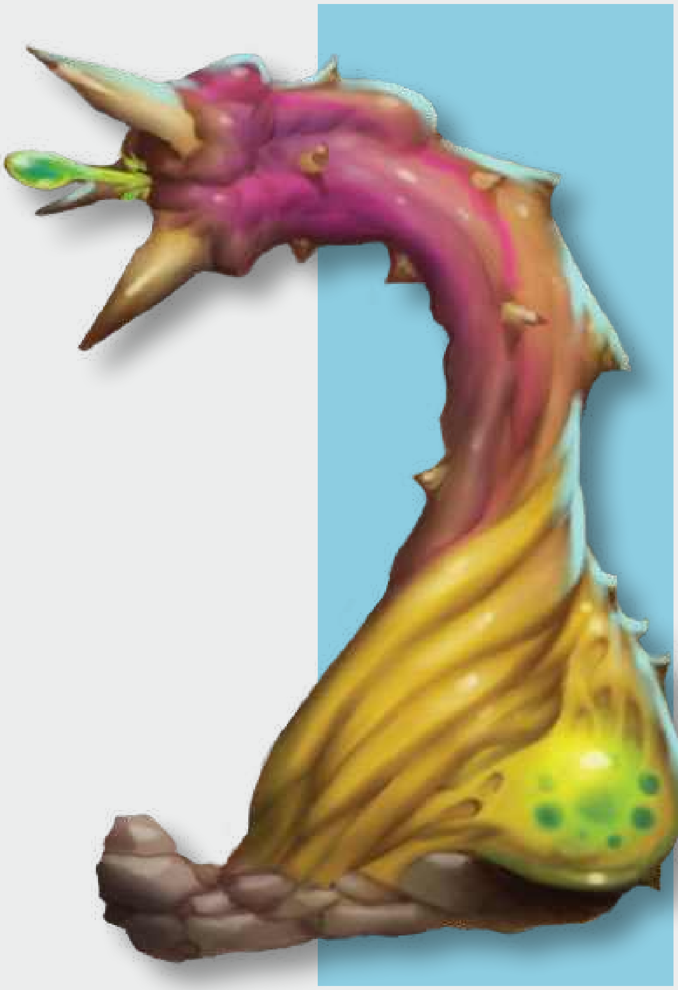


Spitter

Spitters are plants that shoot globs of acidic, poisonous sap at their prey. A spitter consists of a large network of root fibres surrounding a single spitter-stalk. The plants hunt by sensing vibrations through the root network and then launching globs of poison with incredible accuracy. The acid burns through tough hide or armour to deliver the lethal payload of neurotoxin.

If a Traveller is hit by a spitter attack, roll 2D. If this roll is greater than the Protection offered by their armour, then the Traveller must make a Difficult (10+) END check or lose 1D DEX. A Traveller reduced to DEX 0 is paralysed and will be consumed. If a Traveller has no armour, they also suffer 2D damage from the acidic poison.

Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
Spitter	17	0m
Skills	Gun Combat (slug) 2	
Attacks	Acidic Poison (special)	
Traits	—	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Trapper	

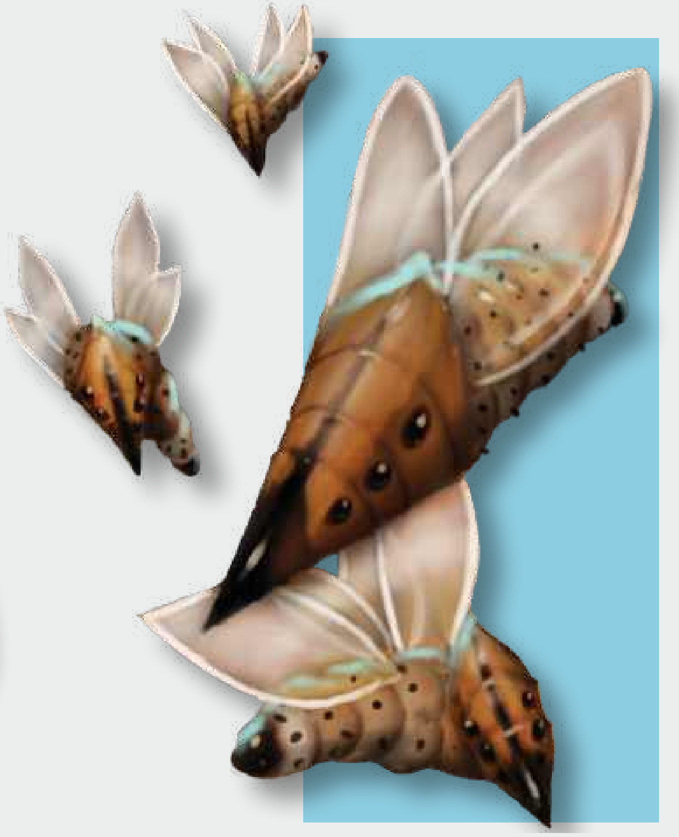


Avian Flock

The avians of the Deathzone are parasites the size of hummingbirds. They attack by diving into the flesh of a target and burrowing into fat and muscle. The avians are capable of bursts of tremendous speed, which they use to drive themselves beak-first into their prey. The creatures are conical in shape and their wings are similar to those of insects, consisting of a thin membrane over a light frame; the wings break off when the avian embeds itself in a host.

An individual avian is little threat to a Traveller but a whole flock is a different matter. Each attack by the flock represents an avian trying to embed itself. If an attack inflicts damage, then the Traveller has a squirming conical parasite-bird stuck in their flesh; Travellers take one point of damage per round per successful attack until the parasites are removed with an Average (8+) Medic check (1D rounds). A flock typically consists of 4D avians.

Animal	**Hits**	**Speed**
Avian	1	0m
Skills	Athletics (dexterity) 3, Melee (natural) 3, Recon 2, Survival 1	
Attacks	Beak (special)	
Traits	Flyer (idle), Small (-4)	
Behaviour	Carnivore, Pouncer	



The Spitting Hedge: The spitting hedge is the final obstacle in the Deathzone. As the name suggests, it is a long row of overgrown spitters. The spitting hedge works just like a regular spitter but is much larger. Its acid attack inflicts 3D damage instead of 2D.

GETTING PAST THE DEATHZONE

There are several ways for the Travellers to get past the hazards of the Deathzone.

The simplest way is just to cross the habitat on foot. If the Travellers have good armour, or obtain armour from the Ilimdaki, they can ignore many of the zone's dangers and a few blasts with a heavy weapon can stop even the most powerful alien threat.

Another route is to bypass the Deathzone by flying over it. The Ilimdaki can construct balloons; if the Travellers can get to the Graveyard, then the Ilimdaki can construct air/rafts or other flying machines. Travellers in a flyer will still be attacked by avian flocks.

If the Travellers experiment with the oxygen generators, they can easily increase the oxygen content of the atmosphere in the Deathzone. If the oxygen percentage is bumped up a few points, the Travellers can set the whole forest on fire.

THE CUSTODIAN

On the far side of the Deathzone is a tower of white stone, the only visible entrance a ledge some five metres above ground level. As they approach the tower, a Droyne emerges and glides down towards them. This is the Custodian. It is not actually a Droyne – it is a robot that looks identical to a living Droyne. The robot is more intelligent than any of the Travellers and has a wealth of defensive systems and weapons, the most notable of which is a gravity-projection field that can immobilise a Traveller and block any projectile weapon, including plasma or fusion bursts.

Attacking the Custodian is pointless. It can easily defend itself against any attack that the Travellers can deploy and there are hundreds more Custodians on the planet. If they somehow destroy this Custodian, more arrive via teleporter after a few minutes.

Initially, the Custodian assumes the Travellers are escaped Ilimdaki and questions them as to how they left their habitat. If the Travellers do not convince the robot that they are actually from outside the pocket universe, it disintegrates them and they wake up as clones in the Maker machine. If they show that they are not Ilimdaki, the Custodian paralyses them with its gravity projector and carries them off to the transit hub.

THE TRANSIT HUB

The transit hub looks like a larger version of the teleport citadel but without the spinning portal in the centre. Instead, there is a bowl-shaped depression surrounded by a gauzy haze that parts when the Travellers approach. On close examination, the haze consists of thousands of tiny metallic objects suspended in an anti-gravity field.

The Travellers are placed inside the hub by the Custodian and the machine is activated. The haze turns silver and then flashes with a colour not seen in our universe. They lose consciousness for a moment – perhaps they are in hyperspace for hours, or only an instant, but they are unaware of the transition as they are flung bodily through jumpspace... to Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER'S REALM

The Travellers materialise on a space station orbiting a silver world. The planet below is covered from pole-to-pole in metal, a globe-spanning city-machine 300,000 years in the making. This station, by contrast, is obviously still under construction. Huge robots carry components into position. Metal flows like liquid to bind sections together. A swarm of activity surrounds the Travellers as the titanic structure is assembled. The technologies involved here are aeons beyond the comprehension of the Travellers – they could no more fathom the workings of this station than a Neanderthal could understand a starship – but some intuitive sense tells them that this is a weapon.

A trio of robots, identical to the Custodian, arrive and surround the Travellers. The robots speak in unison and with perfect Galanglic: '*Welcome. Your arrival is unanticipated but welcome. You will accompany us.*' The robots project a force field, lifting the Travellers into the air and carrying them across the surface of the station.

Up ahead, the Travellers see that the swarm of activity appears to be centred around a particular point. There is a swirl of robots coming and going, of energy flows and transmissions, and at the centre of all this is a small figure. He floats three metres off the ground, in a green sphere of energy, directing the machinery according to his grand design.

All the Travellers feel the urge to prostrate themselves before this *presence*. Those steeped in the culture of a religion may perceive the figure as God; other

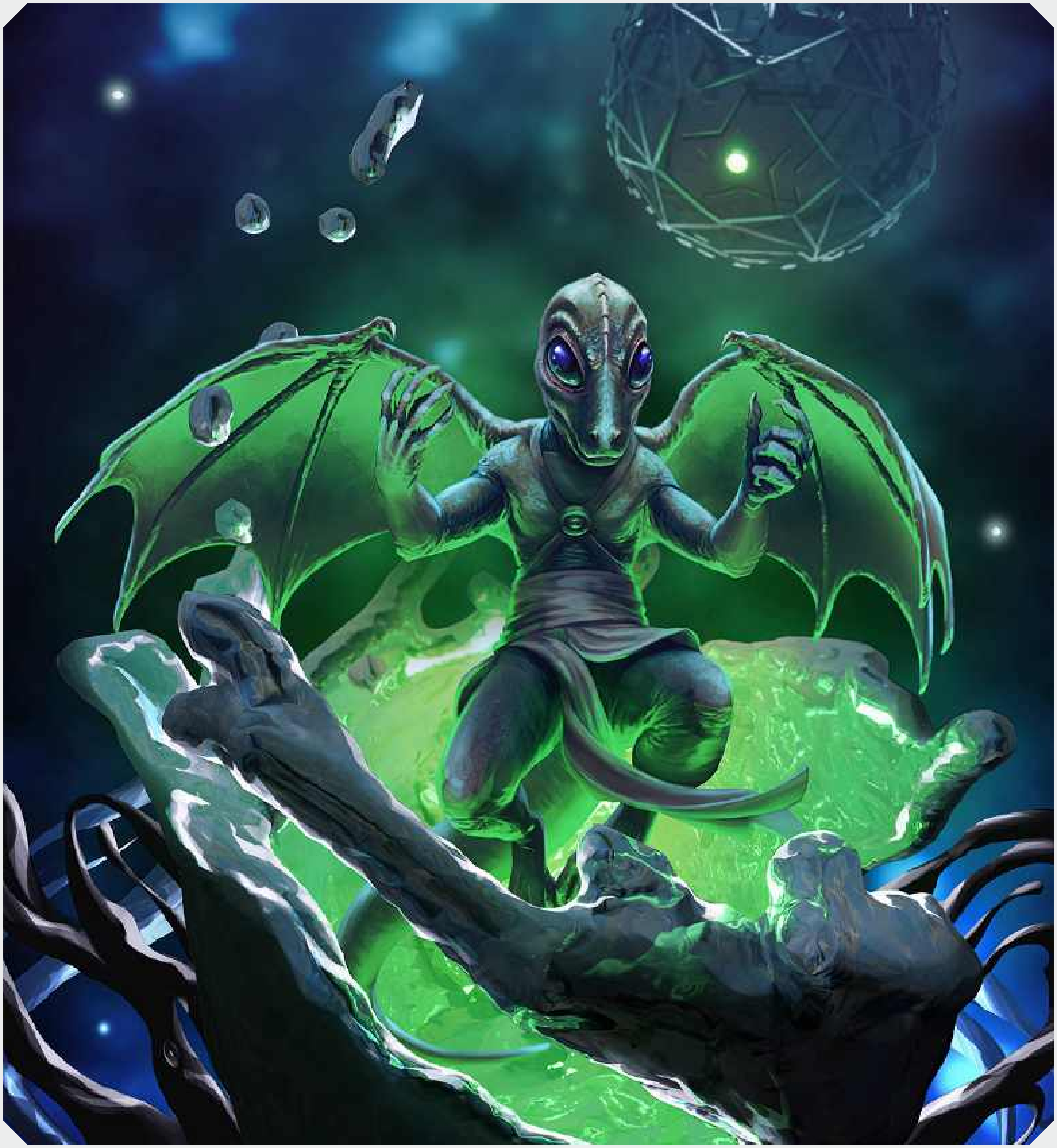
Travellers feel overwhelming feelings of awe and terror. Even at this range, the figure's psychic weight is far beyond anything the Travellers have ever experienced before.

They get close enough to see that the figure is another Droyne; a living Droyne, this time, not a robot duplicate.

He is Yaskoydray.

He cocks his head curiously as the Travellers arrive. His ancient eyes gleam with anticipation. *'I am Grandfather'* he says. '*You are in grave danger.'* He telepathically transmits an image of Seven breaking through the dimensional portal into the pocket universe.

'*You must understand.'* The telepathic contact with Grandfather intensifies...



HUMANITI SUBSPECIES: ILIMDAKI

They call themselves the Inheritors of the Stars. Grandfather wanted servants who had the technical skills to obey his commands and aid in his research but who would not interfere with his experiments. These humans were one of his earliest experiments in producing suitable servants. They are gifted with genetic memory; each Inheritor is born with an encyclopaedic knowledge of physics, chemistry, engineering and other sciences. They are superlative craftsmen and builders.

However, they are nearly incapable of innovation or imagination. Unless pushed by circumstance or outside instruction, they just repeat the most basic activities needed to keep themselves alive. Their civilisation has been wiped out by the Hunters thousands of times and each time they are replaced by clones created in Habitat 1. Grandfather is aware of this repeated slaughter but sees it as an experiment in evolutionary genetics – can the Inheritors overcome their inbuilt restrictions and put their wealth of technical knowledge to use?

This habitat is the most heavily populated in the area. Over 50,000 humans live here, mostly in the farmlands surrounding their capital city, Yas. Their government is a charismatic dictatorship, dominated by the most imaginative and determined individuals. Taking power among the Ilimdaki is as simple as claiming it. Their Tech Level is approximately TL3; they are capable of understanding concepts and technologies up to TL16 but lack the industrial base or impetus to develop beyond this.

USING ILIMDAKI

- Ilimdaki have INT-4 and EDU+4.
- Most Ilimdaki have SOC 6 in their culture, with the exception of a small few such as the queen or the priests.
- Ilimdaki are born with Engineer (all) 5, Mechanic 5, Science (physics-, space- and lifed-based) 5.

CULTURE

Left to their own devices, the Ilimdaki adopt a baseline subsistence culture, building extraordinary well-made and energy-efficient houses out of cut stone and starting to farm. They can stay in this state indefinitely, generation-after-generation, without developing any further culture or technology. In previous iterations, the Hunters wiped the Inheritors out with ease.

The current iteration of Ilimdaki were decanted more than 500 years ago. There are effectively only three notable events in their culture, other than natural disasters like earthquakes and diseases – their creation by the Maker (see Habitat 1), attacks by the Hunters and the ascension of the Queen of Rifles.

Two hundred years ago, a mutant Ilimdaki was born with more ambition and foresight than the rest. The Ilimdaki refer to her as the Queen of Rifles, as she convinced them to make weapons capable of killing Hunters. She brought Inheritor culture up to its current state and commanded them to build defences. The Queen of Rifles' descendants rule the Ilimdaki from the city of Yas. The Hunters continue to prowl the borders, watching for a way in.

The Ilimdaki speak numerous languages, including old Vilani. Their names are drawn from that language.

They have no form of economy or trade; their agriculture produces enough food for all, and tools and other items are held in common. Sexual relations are equally lax; the Ilimdaki have little interest in sex, save for reproduction, and their mating urge is directly related to food supplies and resources. When there are enough resources to support a larger population, fertile young female Ilimdaki seek out suitable mates. Otherwise, reproduction rates are kept at replacement levels. Currently, the Ilimdaki population is in balance with their resources; the land could support millions more if they applied their technological knowledge but they have no impetus to do so.

There are no profesisonals or specialists among them, nor are there teachers. Ilimdaki are born knowing almost everything they will ever know in a lifetime. Infant Ilimdaki can talk and walk as soon as their muscles and bones have developed enough strength; they do not need to learn to do so.

THE WALL

The first Queen of Rifles ordered the construction of defensive ramparts to protect the Ilimdaki against the Hunters. These fortifications are still in place, perfectly maintained and secure as they were 200 years ago. The Wall is eight metres high on average with a bastion placed every kilometre and gatling guns and rifle emplacements all along the walls. Vegetation has been cleared on either side of the Wall, creating a 200-metre wide kill zone.

The Wall is not a perfect defence against the resourceful and vicious Hunters but proof against most attacks. Incursions are a rare event and the Ilimdaki have the advantage of both numbers and technology.

YAS

The city of Yas is a study in contrasts. Every building is perfectly constructed and maintained but was clearly built without any regard for symmetry or proper placement. Other than a single main thoroughfare running through the city, there are no streets or roads. The buildings were built when they were needed, wherever the builders happened to be standing at the time. The growth of the city can be traced like rings on a tree; first a cluster of workshops and factories, then living quarters and communal dining rooms, and then more workshops.

A Routine (+6) Science (archaeology or sophontology) or Craft (architecture) check (INT) notes several unusual things about the city. Firstly, architecture styles and techniques have not changed since the city was first built – the oldest buildings are identical in construction technique and design to those still under construction. Secondly, the overall aesthetic is similar to that of the starport that the Travellers arrived at.

At the centre of the city is the palace, where the current ‘ruler’ of the Ilimdaki resides. Queen Nalu is a direct female-line descendant of the original Queen of Rifles, although she lacks her ancestors’ innovative streak. Nonetheless, she takes her responsibilities seriously and as soon as she realises that the Travellers are outsiders with the capacity for original thought, she will do everything in her power to get them to aid the Ilimdaki.

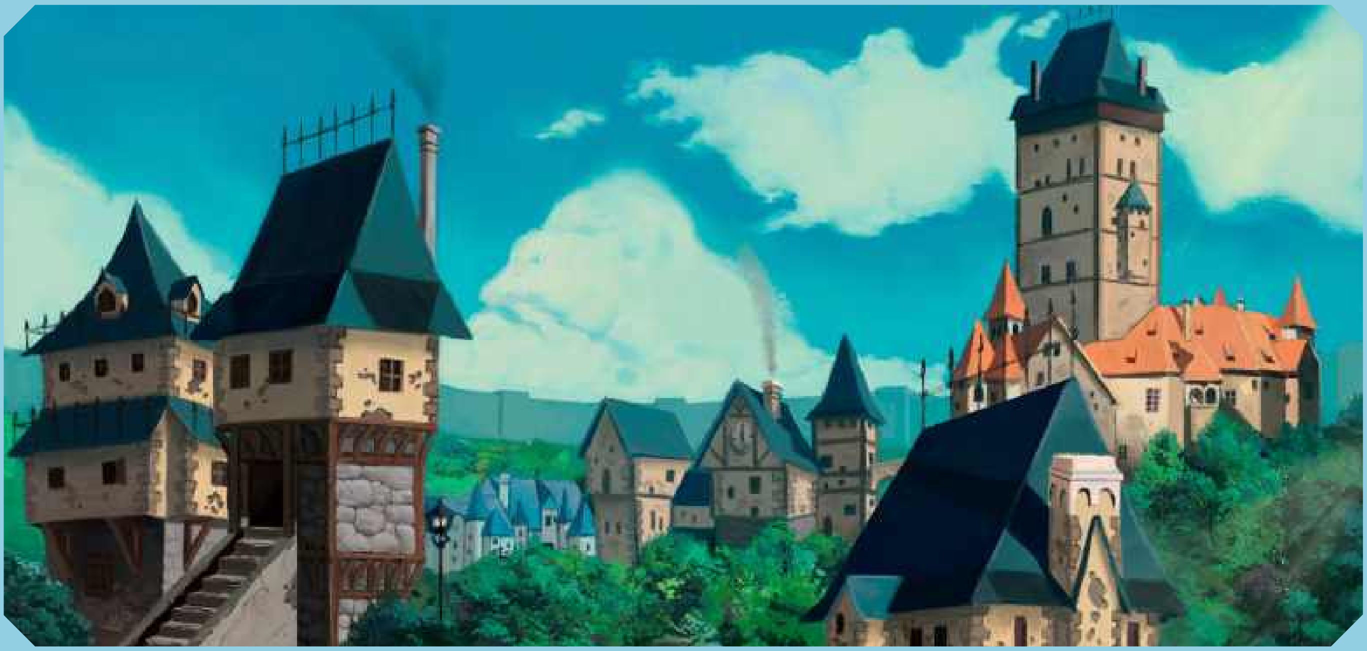
Nalu is advised by the religious leaders of the Ilimdaki, who worship the Maker. Their genetic memory means that the Ilimdaki know that the Maker machine is a cloning facility but they worship whatever force or intelligence built the Cloning Machine in the first place. Effectively, they indirectly worship Grandfather in a hesitating, confused fashion. The leader of the priestly caste is Irkur, an elderly priest who is next in line to be sent to tend to the Maker (see page 124). He clings to his current role with all his might; he is the most ambitious and conniving Ilimdaki of the current generation.

ROLEPLAYING THE ILIMDAKI

The Ilimdaki are very frustrating to deal with, as they have the ability to solve almost any problem but lack the drive to do so. An Ilimdaki farmer knows enough about genetic engineering to boost his crop yield 100-fold and knows enough about computer programming and industrial design to build robots to do all his work for him – but will never think of doing so unless prompted. Instead, he tills the same fields and harvests the same crops that his ancestors did.

No matter who they are, the Travellers have more imagination and drive than any of the Ilimdaki. The Ilimdaki desperately need leadership and guidance; they are bred to be a slave race. The Referee should take care to portray the Ilimdaki as intelligent but pathologically unmotivated and uninspired. Once given an idea, they are masters at putting it into operation but cannot arrive at ideas themselves.

The Ilimdaki are still limited by the laws of physics. An Ilimdaki toddler has the technical know-how to build a plasma rifle but no idea how to go about finding the raw materials. Even given all the necessary parts and equipment, the Ilimdaki would still take as long as any other expert to complete the task.



VARGR SUBSPECIES: THE HUNTERS OF MEN

Aeons ago, Grandfather's agents took wolves from Earth and engineered the Vargr race. The creatures called Hunters are another form of Vargr, an experiment in enhanced intelligence and intuition. Hunters are gifted with incredible powers of reasoning and creativity. By human standards, everyone is a super-genius, a Da Vinci with fangs. A Hunter can learn a language just by listening to it for a few minutes, or work out how to use a technological device by experimentation in a fraction of the time it would take a human to do so. In terms of pure intellect, they are almost as intelligent as Grandfather himself was, back when he was just a mutant Droyne.

However, they have genetic blocks against co-operation. They loathe the presence of other sophonts, finding them intolerable. When new Hunters are born, they are abandoned by their mother as soon as they are weaned. Left alone, these cubs quickly develop their own language, their own understanding of science and their own tools. Theoretically, a lone Hunter could keep innovating, recreating the progress of hundreds of years of scientific research in a single lifetime. As a whole, the Hunters are effectively TL2 but some Hunters have gone from having nothing to scratch-building nuclear reactors and gauss weapons.

There are approximately 5,000 Hunters living in their habitat.

USING HUNTERS

- Hunters have INT+4 but are feral and roll only 1D for EDU.
- They also have STR+2, DEX+2, END+2.
- Hunters have a vicious bite that uses the Melee (natural) skill and inflicts 1D+1 damage.
- When learning new skills, Hunters gain a new level 0 skill in 1D rounds, a level 1 skill in 1D minutes and a level 2 skill in 1D hours. Level 3 and higher skills are gained at the normal rate.

CULTURE

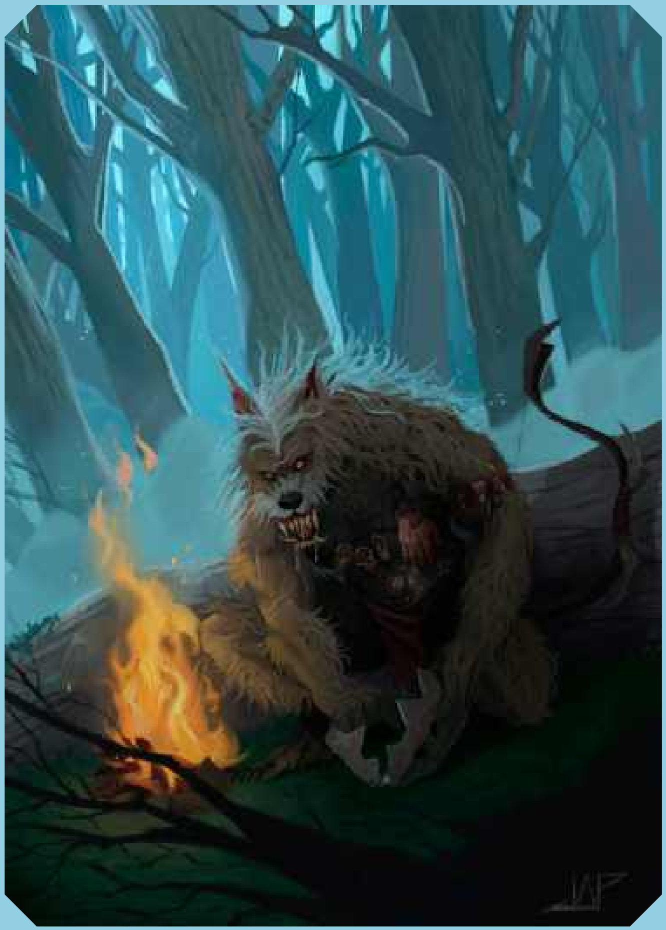
Hunters are solitary creatures, savagely territorial with no compunction about murdering trespassers. Their warped intellects make them extremely paranoid; the main restriction on Hunter progress is constant internecine warfare. They are smart enough to see the value of co-operation but cannot bring themselves to do so. At best, they can agree to short-term truces to mate or work together on extremely important projects, like wiping out the Ilimdaki (the only thing Hunters dislike more than each other is a non-Hunter sophont).

Hunter territories are dotted with small fortified households, each of which is utterly unlike its neighbours. Lone Hunters tend to take over abandoned households and each household includes a laboratory, workroom, larder and an alarming number of death-traps.

ROLEPLAYING HUNTERS

Hunters are sociopathic geniuses. Every Hunter is smarter than any Traveller and they enjoy playing with their prey. They especially despise the Ilimdaki; the Hunters know that the humans have all the advantages they need to defeat them but lack the will to carry this through to completion.

Play a Hunter as a cross between a werewolf, Batman and a genius serial killer. Take every opportunity to demonstrate the Hunter's intellectual superiority to the Travellers but also their lack of a common culture. A Hunter might lurk out of sight, eavesdropping on the Travellers until it intuits the syntax of their language. It might then question a Traveller about their weapons and despite the Hunter never having seen a laser before, would quickly grasp the weapon's principles and capabilities. Then, and only then, would the Hunter attack, using its superior speed and agility to get into close range.



THE SECRET OF THE ANCIENTS

I was the first of my race to dream of the stars. I led them out into the universe. I built this civilisation. I am Yaskoydray, Grandfather, the maker of the makers of mind.

Grandfather uses his psionic powers to project a series of memories into the Travellers. The Travellers experience events of thousands of years ago, reliving them in the personas of former servants and agents of Grandfather. In effect, your players will use temporary pre-generated characters, known as the Precursors, to replace their Travellers for this adventure.

Thousands of years ago, the Ancients civilisation was at its height. The Precursors lived through this golden age, when Grandfather and his Sons explored the galaxy and created wonders beyond the wildest ambitions of lesser species. The Ancients moved worlds and drank stars; they raised up species to sentience, they built thinking machines, they reshaped the universe to their own ends. The Precursors were part of these efforts – they built a new laboratory for Grandfather's experiments, travelled to Earth to recruit a new workforce and experimented in finding the ideal servants for Grandfather's needs.

Not everyone shared Grandfather's visions. Some unaugmented Droyne chafed under the rule of immortal mutant super-geniuses; other creations of Grandfather considered rebelling against his grand design. As influential agents of Grandfather, the Precursors were approached by dissidents who hoped to recruit them.

The Ancients never declined – the ongoing greatness of their civilisation was what destroyed them. The Sons' astounding works began to interfere with each other. Experiments corrupted others. Technological and artistic visions became incompatible. The Sons began to fight. Dispassionately, scientifically, Grandfather began a program of genocide.

During the war, the Precursors commanded an Ancients warfleet and may have even exterminated one of the Sons. Before his destruction, the Son attempted to convince them to switch sides by telling them Grandfather's secret...

This sequence of memories has an ulterior motive. Grandfather is psionically scanning the Travellers, delving deep into their minds. By the time the Travellers' awareness returns to the present day, he will know them better than they know themselves...

TEN THOUSAND YEARS.... AND MORE

This is not a conventional *Traveller* adventure. The Precursors are all hundreds or thousands of years old and have access to incredible resources and technology, beyond TL20. The normal *Traveller* rules are not designed to cope with entities who operate on this scale, so this adventure uses a variation on them.

Instead of the usual characteristics, the following are used:

Analysis (ANL): Gathering information, research, problem-solving.
Co-Ordination (COO): Utilising assets effectively, issuing orders, commanding groups.
Influence (INF): Political sway, persuasion.
Warfare (WAR): Combat and tactics.

These characteristics are rated from 2 to 12 and have the same range of modifiers as in the standard game but are on a much higher scale.

The skills used are listed below; note that these skills also measure access to resources and influence in that field:

- **Construction:** Building mega-structures.
- **Droyne Cultures:** Knowledge and sway within Droyne culture.
- **Economics:** Trade and economic influence and knowledge.
- **Fleet:** Space-based military tactics and access to starships.
- **Geo-Engineering:** Altering the ecology or environment of a planet.
- **Ground Forces:** Ground-based military tactics and access to combat robots.
- **Logistics:** Access to resources and transport assets.
- **Primitive Cultures:** Knowledge and sway within human or Vargr cultures.
- **Psionic Engineering:** Utilising mental powers.

- **Space Engineering:** Space-based engineering, altering stars, constructing ringworlds and so on.
- **Subterfuge:** Deception, under-handed tactics, stealth.
- **Synthetic Cultures:** Knowledge and sway within the Artificial Intelligence culture.
- **Uplift Engineering:** Altering living species using genetic or cybernetic engineering.

TIME INCREMENTS

This scenario takes place over thousands of years, so the standard *Traveller* time frame chart has to be expanded.

EXAMPLE CHECKS

Constructing a warfleet: Average (8+) Construction check (1D decades, COO)
Fighting a battle in space: Difficult (10+) Fleet check (1D weeks, WAR)
Establishing a new colony on a garden world: Routine (6+) Construction check (1D years, COO)
Establishing a new colony on a hostile world: Difficult (10+) Geo-Engineering check (1D decades, COO)
Uplifting wolves to humanoid sophonts: Very Difficult (12+) Uplift Engineering check (1D millennia, ANL)

ADVANCEMENT

Between episodes in this adventure, the Precursors can improve themselves. Each Precursor has 10 advancement points to spend between episodes. Skills cost a number of points equal to their level; characteristic increases cost two points per level, as per the Advancement table. Characteristic increases must be bought in order (so, you need to take a +2 increase to ANL before you take a +3, and so on).

In short, you cannot get this wrong. Just throw situations at the Precursors and see how they react. For Referees chafing against this freeform structure, rest assured that the campaign will revert to a more traditional adventure layout soon.

GRANDFATHER'S SECRET

While the Travellers are experiencing the memories of Grandfather's former servants, events are transpiring in the present. The renegade Son, Seven, has broken through the outer layers of Grandfather's defences and is battling towards Grandfather himself. This is part of a trap laid by Grandfather – there are thousands of waves of defence drones and warships between Grandfather's space station and the space station itself is a superweapon designed to attack Seven's mind directly.

It is a trap – but it is also a gamble. Seven is (or was) a clone of Grandfather, just as intelligent and paranoid as he is (only it has transformed itself into a cybernetic monstrosity, a living warship). If Grandfather fails to destroy his wayward Son, it will kill him.

More precisely, it will kill this instance of Grandfather. Grandfather has cloning facilities hidden across the stars, which can produce replacement bodies but he wants more than a backup version of himself; he wants continuity of consciousness. While the Travellers are

Expanded Time Increments

Time Frame	Increment	Example Action
1D Seconds	One second	Shooting, punching, jumping
1Dx10 Seconds	Ten seconds	Rerouting power, opening a comms channel
1D Minutes	One minute	Applying first aid, basic technical tasks
1Dx10 Minutes	Ten minutes	More complex technical tasks, searching an area thoroughly
1D Hours	One hour	Building a shelter, moving through the wilderness
1Dx4 Hours	Four hours	Researching a problem
1Dx10 Hours	Ten hours	Repairing a damaged ship
1D Days	One day	Combing a city for a missing person
1D Months	One month	Establishing a base
1D Years	One year	Constructing a starship
1D Decades	One decade	Settling a planet
1D Centuries	One century	Building a megastructure
1D Millennia	One millennium	Stellar engineering

Advancement

Characteristic	+1	+2	+3	+4	N/A
Cost	2	4	6	8	N/A
Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Cost	1	2	3	4	5

REFEREE ADVICE

This adventure should be approached in a more freeform manner than others. Often, the question is not if the Precursors can overcome a problem but how they choose to overcome it. They have access to immense resources and technology. The Precursors are demi-gods, so focus on the impact of their decisions, not on the difficulty of accomplishing a task. Note that there are gaps of hundreds or thousands of years between episodes, so even if the Precursors do something unexpected ('we blow up the planet and fly off to start our own stellar empire'), there is plenty of scope for bringing the adventure back on track. Alternatively, run with the Precursors' ideas; this adventure happens at two removes, as it takes place thousands of years ago and is only a simulation anyway, so there are no lasting consequences.

Remember to let the Precursors use task chains to bring disparate skills to bear on a problem. Let them invent their own technobabble and super-science – the Ancients possessed all sorts of technologies and each Son went down his own path of development, leading to many different technological branches.

reliving the memories, Grandfather is scanning their minds and evaluating their suitability as carriers for his majestic consciousness.

At the end of the adventure, the Referee must pick one of the Travellers to be Grandfather's host. Grandfather will choose the Traveller who is most loyal to his ideals. In several of the episodes of this adventure, the loyalty of the Precursors is tested. Grandfather picks as his host the Traveller who proves themselves the most loyal when a Precursor but also takes competence into account – if one Precursor is consistently and completely loyal, but also unable to cope with the cosmic scope of the adventure, then Grandfather will regretfully pick a second-choice candidate. The implications of being the host are explained in the next adventure.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ANCIENTS

This adventure is broken into a series of episodes, where the Precursors are given a task by their superiors and it is up to them how to accomplish it using the vast resources at their disposal. Tasks may take years or decades to accomplish and thousands of years pass between episodes. Assume that in the periods between tasks, the Precursors are kept alive through bizarre Ancients technology (anagathics, cybernetics, cloned bodies, consciousness transfer and stasis fields).

In each episode, an overview is given of the current state of the Ancients civilisation, including current events, technological developments and the primary concerns of the Ancients government.

CHARIOT OF THE GODS

Time Period: -310,000
Ancients Tech Level: 18–19 at the core; 16–17 at the fringe systems

All Precursors have personal fusion pistols; warships are using disintegrators as their primary weapon and protected by black globes. Self-aware AIs are possible but uncommon. Travel is via starship or shuttle; experiments in teleporter technology have begun but currently teleportation is uniformly lethal to living creatures. Power is generated by microfusion power plants. Communication is still limited to slower-than-light mesons or jump-6 jump torpedoes.

Notable Recent Events:

- Creation of the Vargr.
- Clashes with an alien race, the Varsheen. The Varsheen are in full retreat; the Empire's fleets are occupying their outer colonies and planning an assault on the Varsheen homeworld.

VOYAGE TO EARTH

Read the following to the Precursors:

You are on board the Imperial starship Krinyaoth*, en route to the human birthworld on the fringes of the Empire. You have been tasked by the High Council with a vital mission – you are to acquire a human tribe and transplant it to another world for future cultivation. The humans of the birthworld are still primitive hunter-gatherers. Other transplanted colonies have proved that the species is very amenable to upgrades and engineered evolution; if the random factors align, your transplanted tribe will be equally successful.*

The Krinyaoth *is a standard transport, with only moderate defensive weapons. You are unlikely to encounter hostile forces within Imperial space but that may change as you get closer to the borderlands – the Varsheen Caliphate's fleet has been destroyed but the renegade League of New Thought and the hostile Thua might have ships in one of the systems between here and your destination.*

THE KRINYAOTH

The Precursors' ship in this initial episode is the Krinyaoth, a transport similar to the Ancients derelict that they explored in Descent. It is composed of an upper hull and drive section, mated to a collection of pods that can be swapped in and out to customise it for different missions, like a modular cutter.

The ship's internal factories can assemble more weapon pods but that will consume resources. If you make more weapons, you will have less to work with when you reach the human birthworld.

Let the Precursors argue over the best thing to do in this situation. The ship can build more disintegrators and hull armour from its internal stocks but that means the Precursors will not have as many resources to work with on Earth.

A Difficult (10+) Construction check (ANL) lets the Precursors create weapons without significantly digging into their resource stocks, by building antimatter-warhead missiles instead of costly disintegrators. Alternatively, they can use a Difficult (10+) Subterfuge check (COO) to find an unexpected route to Earth, refuelling at gas giants instead of starbases.

INTERCEPTED

The Thao are a hostile species of gastropod-like (snail-like) creatures, who are at war with the Empire due to a recent border dispute. The Thao have only recently hit TL14; most of their ships are built at TL12–13 and are massively outclassed by the Droyne ships.

Unless the Precursors successfully plotted a safe route to Earth, the *Krinyaoth* encounters a Thao raider. The raider is bigger than the *Krinyaoth* and more heavily armed. It resembles a snail-shell, all off-white curves and force-projector horns. The Thao hail the *Krinyaoth* and demand they surrender their internal factory-pods and feedstock. These internal factories are automated assemblers; the Thao do not have the technological know-how to reverse-engineer these pods but covet them for their ability to produce high-tech goods.

An Average (8+) Fleet check (ANL) will reveal the Thao ship is not a major threat to the *Krinyaoth* but it could damage the ship. An Average (8+) Economics check (ANL) will reveal that giving a few factory-pods to the Thao would not significantly affect the relative strengths of the two species and the *Krinyaoth* could build more pods. It would temporarily diminish the ship's capabilities, however.

A Difficult (10+) Subterfuge check (ANL) will show that Thao sensors cannot penetrate the hull of a Droyne ship; they do not know what is in any of the ship's pods.

Diplomacy: The Precursors can open negotiations with the Thao, either threatening them with the wrath of the Droyne Empire or trading with them.

Convincing the Thao to take a reduced number of factory pods but promising no retaliation from the Droyne: Average (8+) Economics check (INF). Another, nastier option is to hand over a factory pod but program it with a Difficult (10+) Subterfuge check (COO) to construct combat drones or other lethal weapons to destroy the Thao ship from the inside.

Intimidating the Thao into retreating: Difficult (10+) Fleet check (INF)

Combat: The *Krinyaoth* can fire up its short-range disintegrators, activate its flickering black globe shields and engage the Thao ship. Despite the *Krinyaoth*'s massive technological advance, the Thao ship's massive armament makes this close to a fair fight. The *Krinyaoth* will win the engagement; the Precursor's skill check determines how much damage their ship incurs in the battle.

Escape the Thao; the Krinyaoth *jumps to safety but the Thao raider survives:* Average (8+) Fleet check (WAR).

Destroy the Thao ship before it jumps out: Difficult (10+) Fleet check (WAR)

DESTINATION: EARTH

The Droyne have few outposts on Earth but the planet is surrounded by a web of space stations and satellites. Yaskoydray has designated the native sophonts to be a species of special scientific interest, so the planet is closely guarded by automated defence stations and observatories.

The Precursors have been authorised to collect a tribe of some 500 humans. Satellite tracking has them in a small icebound valley in what will be southern Germany. These are *homo neanderthalenis,* not modern *homo sapiens.* They are hunters and gatherers, using stone tools to bring down mammoths and other prey. Agriculture is still thousands of years in the future and civilisation still more remote. The tribes migrate across the landscape in search of better hunting grounds. Their social organisation is rudimentary, with the best hunters having pride of place. They have a language of sorts but describing complex concepts is almost impossible.

The tribe's leader is an elderly but still hale hunter whose name translates as 'Big Old Red'. Other notable power blocs within the tribe include a band of younger hunters led by 'Fast Boy', the best craftsman 'Stone Speaker' and the oldest female, 'Mother of Nine'.

Currently, the tribe is resident in a cave complex on a hillside. The caves offer excellent shelter but hunting is growing scarce. Big Old Red wants to remain in the cave and see if spring brings better prospects, while Fast Boy wants the tribe to strike out south now, while they still have the strength to travel across the ice-clad mountains.

It is up to the Precursors how they want to approach this. The *Krinyaoth* can reconfigure itself to enter the atmosphere and land, or they can travel to the surface in shuttle-pods. The Precursors' instructions from the High Council state that the humans are not to be harmed and that they should be transplanted to their new world with as little trauma as possible. Let the Precursors decide how best to:

- **Collect all 500 humans in one place.** The tribe must be kept intact. Hunting parties come and go from the cave all the time and the tribe is scattered over several kilometres of terrain. How do the Precursors corral and gather the humans?
- **Get them on board the *Krinyaoth.*** The humans have not yet developed a concept of the supernatural – that comes with the development of settled culture and agriculture – but they are terrified of big, powerful things like starships and aliens. The Precursors need to either lure the humans on board or else take control of the tribe.
- **Keep the tribe alive during the year-long journey to their destination.** There is sufficient living space on board the *Krinyaoth* for the humans and the ship can replicate food for humans. Alternatively, the Precursors can put the humans into high-tech low berths for the duration of the voyage.

If the Precursors used resources en route to Earth, the Referee may restrict their options.

Once the humans are on board and properly restrained, the *Krinyaoth* departs for the region of space that will one day be the Trojan Reach.

THE NEW WORLD

The Precursors' designated target is a desert planet in the Trojan Reach, which will be called Cordillon (in the Sindal subsector) in the far future. Cordillon (X443423-C) is a backwater, with few natural resources. Its atmosphere is thin but breathable, especially in the deep canyons left by dried-up seas. Cordillon has almost no water outside its ice caps. There is a native ecosystem, consisting of a species of lichen, that evolved from seaweed, and a few crab-like scavengers.

There is also a renegade Droyne colony on the planet.

Cordillon will be terraformed within 30 years but Yaskoydray wants the humans to learn to adapt to their new environment before altering it. How do the Precursors keep the tribe alive until then? Problems to overcome include:

- **Atmosphere:** The atmosphere of Cordillon is hard to breathe, except the deep depressions. Do the Precursors keep the humans in the dry sea-beds and canyons, or do they provide them with air filters, atmosphere generators or engineer them to tolerate lower oxygen partial pressures so they have a wider range of habitats?
- **Lack of Water:** Cordillon has little surface water. The largest open body of water is near the Consensus colony. Do the Precursors drive the Droyne away, pipe water from the polar ice caps or provide some other source of moisture like air miners?
- **Food Sources:** The only food available on the surface is lichen and crab meat. Humans cannot normally digest elements of the Cordillon biosphere but the Precursors could engineer intestinal bacteria to bridge the gap. Alternatively, they could seed a section of the planet with Earth life or provide food in some other manner. How do they keep the humans from exhausting the food supply?
- **Curtailing Expansion:** Most of the planet is almost uninhabitable. How do the Precursors keep the humans from expanding?

THE DROYNE COLONY

There is a small oynprith of several thousand Droyne already resident on Cordillon. These are part of the Consensus, a Droyne movement that argues for a return to traditional social organisation. They reject Yaskoydray's leadership, preferring their own Leader-castes. Each Consensus *oynprith* is an independent state, although they form a loose coalition with mutual-defence pacts and trade agreements. The Droyne Empire considers them a nuisance at best.

The Consensus also rejects Yaskoydray's technology; they are deliberately bringing down their technological base to the minimum 'socially cohesive level', although they have yet to agree on exactly what that entails. The Cordillon Consensus are at TL12.

The Cordillon Consensus have settled a small city on the shores of the planet's largest sea. Their city is an ideal location for the human colony, with fertile hunting grounds and a breathable, human-tolerable atmosphere.

NEGOTIATIONS

One of the Leader-caste Droyne, an elder specimen named Usstori, speaks for the colony. She is a quiet, earnest Droyne and eager to find a peaceful solution. She even tries to recruit the Precursors to the Consensus. She claims the facts below are true; an Average (8+) Droyne Culture check (ANL) finds some supporting evidence for some of her claims, as well as signs that the government has tried to erase or cover up these facts (admittedly, that could also be because the evidence was planted by Consensus sympathisers and the government merely wishes to eliminate such lies).

- The percentage of Droyne who enter the Leader caste drops every generation. There is now less than one Leader for every 50,000 Droyne in the Empire. Among the Consensus, there is one Leader for every 500 Droyne.
- The Empire no longer serves the best interests of the Droyne. Technology is robbing the Droyne of their heritage and culture; the influence of uplifted slave races is further diluting the species.
- Yaskoydray is a fictional figurehead, a 'Big Brother' invented by the High Council. The first Yaskoydray conveniently appeared during a period of upheaval and social conflict thousands of years ago, and now the Droyne government maintain this deception to preserve their own grip. Without the centralising influence of the Yaskoydray myth, the Droyne would naturally break down into smaller, more sustainable *oynpriths* like the Cordillon colony.

Assuming the Precursors reject Usstori's wild claims, they can deal with the issue of the colony. The Consensus argue that they can share the world without interfering with the human experiment. It is a big planet and Droyne numbers grow slowly. Usstori offers to allocate up to 10% of the planet's surface as a human habitat and promises that her followers will not enter the human reserve. She refuses to permit the Precursors to establish a permanent observation post in the system – the Consensus will tolerate having a few monkeys living on the next continent over but not the Empire's presence. They want to be left alone.

Ignoring the Consensus: The Precursors will doubtless ask how important the Consensus are – can they just ignore the native Droyne? The answer is 'yes... but'. Individual Consensus groups are irrelevant; the Precursors could probably bomb the Consensus from orbit without incurring any problems. They are not citizens of the Droyne Empire and no part of Yaskoydray's domain. They do not matter.

That said, there are other Consensus groups out there. Thus far, the Empire has avoided entering into a confrontation with the Consensus, not because the Consensus is dangerous or powerful but because they have enough to do fighting the League of New Thought and the alien races. Everyone knows that a reckoning with the Consensus is inevitable giving the Empire's expansionist, technocratic policies but that reckoning could be centuries in the future. If the Precursors attack the Consensus on Cordillon, they are jump-starting a conflict that could otherwise be postponed.

Furthermore, there are other Consensus worlds nearby. They cannot hope to challenge the military might of the Empire but the Consensus might retaliate against the human colony, forcing the Precursors to establish a permanent military presence here in the system.

The Negotiation: Either roleplay the negotiations or else have the Precursors make an Average (8+) Droyne Culture check (INF) to determine what concessions they can extract from Usstori on the Negotiations table.

Negotiations

Effect	Result
-6 or less	No humans may be settled on the planet.
-2 to -5	10% of the planet and the Consensus demand control of the human colony.
-1	10% of the planet but the Precursors can establish an observation post.
0	20% of the planet as a human habitat.
1–5	50% of the planet as a human habitat.
6 or more	The Consensus will depart peacefully.

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

Unless the Precursors deliberately choose to give up, they will succeed in establishing the human colony on Cordillon. The only question is how they decide to do it. This adventure focuses on methods, reasoning and moral choices, not questions of success or failure.

MOVING THE COLONY

Another option is to force the colony to move. The Precursors can take a similar approach to the methods they used back on Earth, to round up the Droyne and bring them offworld. A few Fleet and Ground Forces checks (WAR) may be required to blast the colony's defences into ash; let the Precursors come up with their own creative methods for undermining the colony.

DESTROYING THE COLONY

The literal nuclear option – wipe out the Consensus. WAR checks will be needed to determine how efficiently the Precursors deal with the renegade Droyne but in this instance, they do not need to worry about casualties or collateral damage.

THE ART OF WAR

Time Period: -305,000

Ancients Tech Level: 19–21 at the core; 18–19 at the fringe systems

Personal disintegrators and force shields are common small-arms; ships are equipped with proton screens and long-range tractors, as well as disintegrators; the new breed of warships have spinal mount relativity beams that attack enemy ships in the past. Terraforming has advanced massively – Cordillon, for example, has been turned into something close to a garden world. Teleportation portals are not yet in common use but every big ship and city has a few.

Notable Recent Events:

- Varsheen annihilated.
- Consensus erased.
- League of New Thought broken; the League worlds have been conquered by the Empire but League sympathisers have gone underground to spread sedition.
- The Empire has grown too large for the current centralised government to manage; even the establishment of a super-fast jump relay grid (comparable to an x-boat network but composed of millions of jump-capable microdrones) has failed to stem the tide.
- To compensate, Yaskoydray is rumoured to be working on a revolutionary new communications system.

The Precursors are en route back to Cordillon, at the head of a Droyne fleet.

A MISSION OF CULTURE

Read the following to the Precursors:

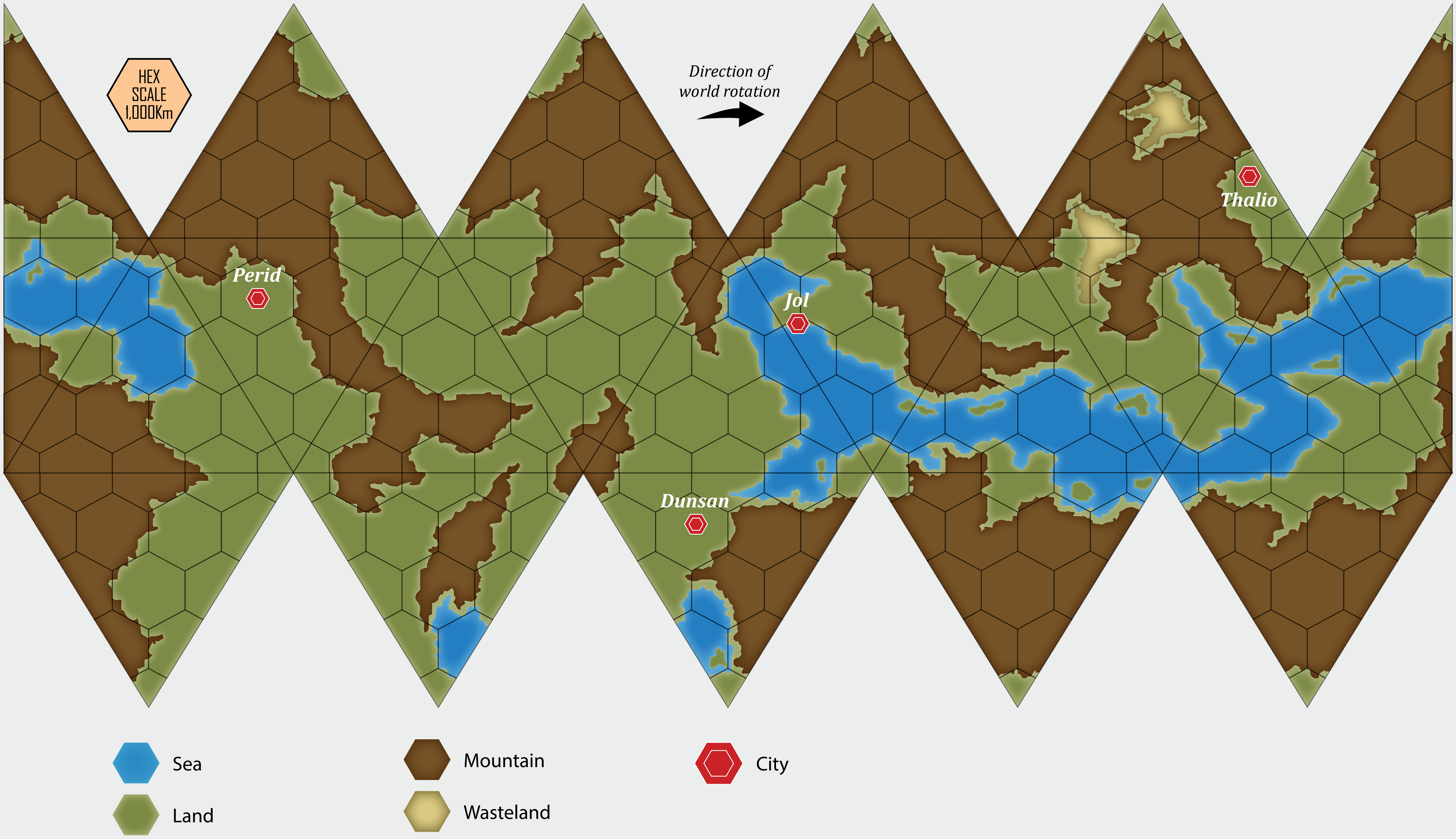
In the 5,000 years since you established the human colony on Cordillon, they have thrived. Subsequent culture-engineering and covert uplift efforts have accelerated the progress of the humans; they are now at a roughly medieval level of development, with burgeoning psionic ability.

The High Council has determined that it is time to move onto the next phase of this experiment. The humans have been bred for creativity; you are to engineer their culture to produce artists, especially visual artists and sculptors. You are permitted to alter the humans on a social, psychological or even genetic level to achieve this result.

There are now some five million humans living on Cordillon, divided into several dozen petty queendoms and empires. Genetic tampering has brought out several traits, including a predilection for synaesthesia and higher intelligence. Approximately 5% of the population are psionic; most psions are recruited into a cross-kingdom religious organisation that worships folk-memories of the Precursors.

CORDILLON

UWP: C431210-B


HEX SCALE 1,000Km
Direction of world rotation
Perid
Jol
Dunsan
Thalio
Sea
Land
Mountain
Wasteland
City

Notable power blocs and representative characters are:

- **Jol:** Located on the shores of the largest sea, with their capital on the site of the old Consensus colony, Jol is primarily a merchant power but their navy gives them considerable military force.
    - The elderly queen of Jol, Aja, is senile and easily confused; she is a puppet of her advisors and the church.
    - Artistically, Jol is by far the most cosmopolitan of the kingdoms. Their culture is influenced by dozens of other nations.
    - **Suggested Encounters:** Aja mistakes the Precursors for emissaries from a distant kingdom; her advisers jostle for position by offering favours to the Precursors and end up tearing the kingdom apart; bands of rival artists stalk the boardwalks of Jol by night, fighting for the Precursors' attention in bloody rapier duels.

- **Perid:** Expansionist Perid is a loose coalition of hill tribes and mercenary bands who have conquered several small kingdoms in recent years.
    - The queen of Perid is a shield-maiden named Laja, a powerful telekinetic witch who escaped a church-run nunnery as a young girl. She despises the church and has banned the organisation within her kingdom; she still respects and honours the sky-gods but considers the religious structure to be hopelessly corrupt.
    - Peridian culture is dismissed by the other kingdoms as barbaric but they are easily the most vibrant, energetic and neophiliac of the cultures.
    - **Suggested Encounters:** Laja assumes the Precursors are here to endorse her crusade against the church; Perid invades Dunsan and wants the Precursors' aid; the artists of Perid are called upon to make weapons instead of art for the war.

- **Dunsan:** Old Dunsan is the largest and best-established kingdom on Cordillon. However, it is in decline; the army is now in control of the crown and the kingdom is riddled with internal divisions, dissent and economic problems.
    - The queen of Dunsan is Hilae, an ambitious woman from one of the older noble houses. She is trying to wrest control of the crown back from the armies by playing generals off against each other.
    - Dunsan is also the seat of the church.
    - Dunsan is the most stable and powerful of the kingdoms; their culture is increasingly degenerate and concerned with worship of the past, however any cultural movements not endorsed by the Dunsanians will have trouble finding traction elsewhere.
    - **Suggested Encounters:** Hilae tries to convince the Precursors to provide for the defence of her nation against Perid, so she can strip her generals of their armies; the Dunsanian nobility reject any calls for new art and just want copies of their ancestors' works; corrupt clergymen offer banned, confiscated art from the church vaults to the Precursors, claiming these are new pieces and this causes conflict with the church.

- **Thalio:** The isolated but powerful kingdom of Thalio has an extremely complex, ritualised culture centred around martial arts and poetry. They have the highest proportion of psions.
    - Unlike the other kingdoms, Thalio is not a matriarchy; it is ruled by a Sacred Master, who always goes masked. This Sacred Master is actually a Droyne – a Droyne shuttle crashed in Thalio centuries ago and the inbred descendants of the survivors are worshipped as gods here.
    - The Sacred Master's vizier is a man named Idec, a sneering eunuch.
    - The church has a few missions in Thalio's ports, but has almost no political influence.
    - Artistically, Thalio is the most advanced and erudite culture but their art is heavily bound up in their ritual behaviour. Convincing them to develop new styles may be difficult.
    - **Suggested Encounters:** Thalion monks mistake the Precursors for escaped kin of the Sacred Master and try kidnapping them; Idec leads a revolt against the Precursors; the church asks the Precursors to help expand its influence in Thalio in exchange for support.

- **The Church of the Sky Gods:** The psion-dominated Church has branches in almost every kingdom.
    - The head of the church is the Speaker for the Sky, a male psion named Yerak. He is a fervent believer in the sky gods and believes that the barbarians of Perid must be wiped out in a holy crusade.
    - The church has sponsored art in the past, mostly depictions of the sky gods. The church controls many artists but they produce little innovative work.

  - **Suggested Encounters:** Church telepaths read the Precursors' minds and learn their true origins; their presence causes a schism and the establishment of an anti-Speaker; all the art depicts the Precursors themselves.

Making Art: Ask the Precursors how they intend to convert the disparate warring kingdoms into an artistic colony. They can intervene directly (beaming down into the capital of Dunsan, disintegrating a convenient mountain and shouting 'make art... or else!') or indirectly (breeding more artistic humans, subliminal messaging, disguising themselves as artistic patrons, taking over the church).

Possible skill checks:
- *Sponsoring artistic movements:* Primitive Cultures check (COO)
- *Introducing new cultural elements:* Primitive Cultures (INF)
- *Subliminal messaging:* Subterfuge (INF)
- *Analysing art:* Primitive Cultures (ANL)
- *Taking over the economy of a kingdom:* Economics (INF)

Remember that the Precursors have enough personal, psionic, technological and economic power to appear as gods to these primitives. Their mere presence deforms the culture.

Artistic Endeavour: Once the Precursors have decided on their method for producing a culture of artists, skip ahead 10 years. How have the Precursors' plans worked? Is Cordillon a beacon of art and beauty, or have they warped this primitive society to breaking point?

INVADERS

Read the following to the Precursors:

A decade has passed since you began to influence the culture of the human colony. You have been assigned as overseers and observers, cataloguing the effects of your intervention. The fleet you arrived with has moved on; your in-system assets are limited to a dozen small system defence boats, your personal ships – each of you has a jump-capable frigate or yacht – and an orbiting starbase.

You are alerted by the automated sensor grid – multiple contacts have just jumped in-system. They have arrived within the orbit of the system's gas giant; estimated time to Cordillon is less than a week. They do not match any known configuration.

What do you do?
- **Scan the invaders:**
  - A Fleet check (ANL) shows the invaders are not of any known design but appear to be extremely well-armed. Their weapons are on a par with those of Droyne ships of the line. Against a Droyne fleet, it would be an even fight. Against the Precursors' mediocre defences, it will be a slaughter.
  - A Construction check (ANL) reveals these invaders are robots, not starships. They have no crew but are operated by Artificial Intelligences. They are obviously capable of building more of themselves.
  - A Synthetic Culture check (ANL) reveals a hegemonising swarm like this cannot be reasoned or negotiated with; they are locked into their programming.
- **Negotiate:** This is futile; the invaders do not respond to radio signals or meson bursts at all.
- **System Defence Boats:** If the Precursors dispatch the system defence boats to investigate or attack the alien ships, have them make an Average (8+) Fleet check (WAR). Regardless of the result, the system defence boats are wiped out; however, if the check is successful, the Precursors gather useful information about the capabilities of the invaders. Their ships are more manoeuvrable than Droyne ships but do not possess shields; instead, their hulls are studded with individual black globe cells that are switched on and off. It should be possible to attack such a ship by overloading a cell and then concentrating fire on that weak point.
- **Flee the system:** The Precursors can jump out to the nearest Droyne stronghold, a space station called Oynmoyeroub some five parsecs coreward. Doing so means they run into a Droyne space fleet (see page 149).

Shortly after the invaders arrive, a message courier pod arrives in-system and sends a meson transmission to the Precursors. It informs them that a new and hostile species has been encountered. They have attacked several Droyne colonies but skipped worlds inhabited by primitive transplanted human or Vargr colonies. Yaskoydray has dispatched a task force to deal with the crisis. The Precursors are under instructions to hold out for as long as possible and gather information about the invaders.

DEATH MACHINES

These invaders are a hostile machine race, a swarm designed to wipe out spacefaring cultures that could be a threat to their long-dead makers. A Droyne exploratory voyage into the core drew their attention and now their scouts have reached Droyne space. The invaders have no name for themselves; the Droyne Empire terms them Dyapyuse, Death Machines.

Their ships are fractal, resembling metallic snowflakes. Their communication system is a technological form of telepathy; psionic Precursors find the presence of the Dyapyuse unpleasant and discordant.

The Dyapyuse are self-replicating spacecraft and drones. When they enter a system, they launch probes towards any likely worlds. They then either attack or fall back and replicate more of their kind by mining asteroids. They have no interest in civilisations below TL7 – they only wipe out jump-capable races. When they need to interact with organic creatures, they capture 'samples' and turn them into cyborgs.

THE OCCUPATION

The invader forces rapidly identify and destroy obvious signs of Droyne presence, blasting satellites and small craft into dust. If the Precursors remain on the starbase, they will be killed (and restored from personality backups later on). Their best tactic is to flee to the surface and hide amid the humans (AI Precursors can transfer their core programs to ship-board computer cores, bury the ships on the surface and interact via drones or remote-control clone bodies).

Once the *Dyapyuse* are secure in the system, they turn their attention to the sophont population. *Dyapyuse* ships plunge through the atmosphere and begin extracting metal from mountains to build more ships.

The *Dyapyuse* have no individuality and no culture but are intelligent enough to realise that there may be Droyne among the humans. Their first action is to capture a few random humans and dissect their brains to learn the local language and culture. They then abduct more humans and turn them into cyborgs to serve as emissaries.

These cyborgs are clad in a black techno-organic webbing that covers the entire body. This substance can be reshaped to form weapons or tools, or cover organic components as armour. The cyborgs can also withdraw their webbing into cavities within the body to pass for unaugmented humans.

They offer gifts such as gold (atomic transmutation powered by antimatter fuel cells means the robots can easily turn lead into gold), magic swords (nanotubes woven into conventional steel), curealls and other high-technology products presented in a manner comprehensible to quasi-medieval humans. In exchange, they want the humans to hand over any Droyne for termination.

Evading the Machines: The Precursors' chances of evading the cyborgs depends on the changes they wrought earlier and on their contacts and allies among the humans. If they acted as autocrats, they will be rapidly betrayed by the humans. If they cultivated friends, they can hide out until help arrives.

The cyborg agents of the invaders search for the Droyne by looking for signs of high technology, such as electromagnetic emissions, gadgets, power sources, jump tachyon bursts, meson emitters and unusual events. Ask the Precursors how they intend to hide and how they intend to spy on the invaders. The bigger the risks they take, the more data they can gather but the greater the risk they incur.

Notably, the Precursors all have personal force shields that block many forms of attack. See page 149 for details.

Call for Subterfuge checks (COO), using a difficulty dependent on the precautions taken by the Precursors (as shown on the Subterfuge table), whenever they act. If the check fails, the cyborgs detect the Precursors' presence and start to home in on them. The first failed check means that a cyborg arrives in the nearest city; two failed checks mean the cyborgs start house-to-house searches; three failed checks draw robot assassins on the characters.

Play up the contrast between the super-high-technology of the combatants and their primitive surroundings. If the Precursors are masquerading as alien gods of war and leading charges of mounted medieval knights against cyborg death machines, you are in the right frame of mind.

Collecting Data: If the Precursors can gather intelligence about the invaders, they will be able to aid the eventual Droyne rescue operation. Each piece of data listed here grants a DM that applies in the coming battle.

- *Discovering that the Dyabyuse have no interest in destroying primitive cultures but are focussed on wiping out the Droyne:* Difficult (10+) Synthetic Cultures check (ANL). DM+1 if successful
- *Discovering that the Dyabyuse communicate through telepathy and that powerful psions can perceive but not understand their transmissions:* Difficult (10+) Psionic Engineering check (ANL). DM+1 if successful
- *Using a powerful telepath to attack the Dyabyuse:* Very Difficult (12+) Psionic Engineering check (COO). DM+2 if successful
- *Capturing and dissecting a cyborg:* Capturing the creature could involve a variety of methods such as a Subterfuge check (COO) for a trap, Primitive Cultures check (INF) to convince an army of Humans to rise up and attack the machine and so forth. Average (8+) Synthetic Cultures check (ANL) to analyse the cyborg. DM+1 if successful.
- *Disabling and examining a Dyabyuse ship (difficult, for an active ship, but the Precursors could discover the aliens are building more of their kind and sneak into a Dyabyuse 'nursery'):* Sneaking in requires a Subterfuge check (COO); examining the ship requires a Fleet check (ANL). DM+4 if successful

Subterfuge

Precursor Action	Check Difficulty
Leaving personal shields active	Difficult (10+)
Using transport beyond TL4	Difficult (10+)
Space travel	Very Difficult (12+)
Radio emissions	Average (8+)
Meson bursts	Difficult (10+)
Using a TL4+ power source openly	Average (8+)
Using a TL16+ power source openly	Difficult (10+)
Attracting attention of locals	Difficult (10+)
Hiding in a highly populated area	Routine (6+)
Local support & allies	Routine (6+)
Using natural phenomenon to conceal activity (volcanic, geomagnetic stress, etc)	Average (8+)

PERSONAL SHIELDS

All the Precursors in this era have personal shields. If an active shield is hit with a laser, plasma, fusion, meson or disintegrator burst, roll 2D: on 3+, the shield absorbs the attack completely. On 2-, the wearer is knocked unconscious or killed. Each successive attack inflicts DM-1 to the shield roll; the shield recharges at the rate DM+1 every 15 minutes. A Precursor can force a recharge with a successful Average (8+) Logistics check (COO); add the Precursor's Effect to the shield's DM. Large and more powerful shields can start with a positive DM.

When a personal shield is active, it can easily be detected by those with sufficiently advanced sensors.

CYBORG ASSASSINS

The assassins are equipped with disintegrator wands. At this level of technology, personal weapons and defensive systems are immensely powerful. Anyone caught without a personal shield is instantly crippled or killed by a disintegrator blast. The cyborgs have slightly weaker personal shields that are pierced on 4- instead of 2-.

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	8	Fleet 1, Ground Forces 3, Primitive Culture 2, Subterfuge 1, Uplift Engineering 2
COO	10	
INF	4	
WAR	10	

THE RESCUE

Several weeks after the invasion begins, the Droyne launch their counter-attack. Read the following:

You all feel the curious sensation of telepathic contact drift across the surface of your mind. It is unfamiliar to you but oddly inspiring and comforting... paternal, perhaps, even for those of you with no such frame of reference. The contact grows stronger and then a figure teleports in using psionic power.

It is a Droyne but not a caste you have ever seen before. He exudes power, authority, intelligence... divinity. At first, you can only assume that this is Yaskoydray himself but the Droyne detects this fleeting thought and cocks his head. NO, he signals, I AM ONE SEVEN FOUR. YOU WILL ACCOMPANY ME AND AID ME.

The Droyne unclips a silver disc from his belt and throws it into the air. The disc expands into a free-floating teleport portal. He gestures to it. PLEASE.

The portal leads to the bridge of a Droyne warship; a brand-new design. The bridge is like a huge stadium, with plenty of open air for flying. The crew perch at control plinths on the walls and interface telepathically with controls to join a fast-thinking psionic collective. AI characters can also integrate with this collective but humans and Vargr are excluded.

This ship is vastly more advanced than other Droyne ships the Precursors have travelled on. Among other innovations, it has a prototype ansible – a faster-than-light communication system. This ansible works on a higher level of jumpspace than that accessible using conventional jump drives, allowing messages to be transmitted over tens of parsecs instantaneously.

One Seven Four: One Seven Four is a clone of Yaskoydray, one of the 400 Sons. He is physically and mentally identical to Grandfather and has the same incredible abilities. His intellect dwarfs that of any of the Precursors, even the AIs. He is naturally immortal and his psionic abilities are immensely potent. Play him as a young and proud god.

The only way One Seven Four differs from Yaskoydray is in his psychology. The two had identical personalities when first created but are now diverging as they have different experiences and occupy different places with Droyne society.

One Seven Four questions the Precursors, demanding to know what they learned about the invaders. He informs them that the machines also attacked dozens of other systems and appear to have come from a region near the core. One Seven Four's task force is part of a massive multi-system counterattack, overseen by the Sons and co-ordinated perfectly using the ansibles.

The Battle of Cordillon: The Precursors are each given command of a smaller warship as part of the task force. The Droyne ships are outnumbered but in terms of firepower the two sides are roughly matched and the Droyne have two advantages. Firstly, they are commanded by a tactical super-genius. Secondly, they have intelligence gathered by the Precursors.

Have the Precursor with the highest combined Fleet and WAR DMs make a Very Difficult (12+) check. Other Precursors may assist as part of a suitable task chain. Also add any DMs accumulated by the Precursors while hiding on Cordillon and consult the Battle of Cordillon table.

After the battle, the war continues. The Droyne Empire and the *Dyabyuse* clash for another 100 years, until the last of the swarm is destroyed.

Battle of Cordillon

Effect	Outcome of the Battle
-6 or less	Rout. Most Droyne ships are destroyed, including those of the Precursors. They are restored later from personality backups.
-2 to -5	A bloody draw. Neither side can claim victory. The Droyne retreat and return with reinforcements but, by then, the *Dyabyuse* have converted a whole planet into a warship swarm. The second battle is won by the Droyne but is even more devastating.
-1	Pyrrhic victory. The Droyne win but suffer hideous losses. 1D Precursor ships are lost.
0	Victory! One Precursor ship is destroyed.
1–5	Victory! Thanks to the Precursors' information, One Seven Four is able to outwit the enemy and trick them into an englobement that allows many Droyne ships to concentrate fire on the robot's weak points.
6 or more	Total victory! One Seven Four develops a new superweapon on the spot that attacks the minds of the *Dyabyuse* directly; it wipes out their entire fleet.

SHADOW OF THE SUN

Time Period: -302,000
Ancients Tech Level: 26+ at the core; 23–24 at the fringe systems

At this level of technology, teleportation portals are ubiquitous. Whole planetary systems can be crossed with a single footstep. While some ships still have their own jump drives, it is more common to use interstellar gates to travel from system-to-system. The ansible network links the entire Ancients civilisation together.

Notable Recent Events:
- The arrival of the Sons has transformed the Empire. Now, there are several hundred districts, each commanded by a Son, each mimicking the structure of the old centralised government.
- Technological progress has increased in speed but each Son is following his own line of development. Debates on how to integrate the various technologies from the different districts are ongoing but hampered by the fact that only the Sons understand many aspects of the new technology.
- Cordillon has fulfilled its potential – thanks to ongoing manipulation of the culture, psychology and genetics of the inhabitants, it is now a world of brilliant artists. The planet has been allowed to advance to TL8. A flying Droyne city, Thuat, now hangs in the skies above. This city is the site of a grand celebration of the arts.
- One Seven Four has established a research station close to the system's star. This base is called Ei'a; the Precursors have all visited it several times.

Furthermore, Precursors who have high Culture skills know some secrets...

Droyne Culture 4+: There are growing differences between Yaskoydray and the Sons. The High Council – an increasingly moribund political body – has called for the Sons to use the ansible network to improve cohesiveness across the Empire.

Primitive Culture 4+: The Sons have mostly abandoned Yaskoydray's uplift experiments as a dead end. Human and Vargr worlds are being ignored and left to decay.

Synthetic Culture 4+: There are traces on the data networks; rumours that the old League of New Thought is still extant, although it could be a cover for the Sons who oppose Yaskoydray.

THE GRAND UNVEILING

Read the following to the Precursors:

Three thousand years have passed since the victory over the alien invaders. Cordillon is now a world of culture and art, and today marks a grand festival to celebrate the continued rise of the Droyne civilisation. Hundreds of ships have come through the interstellar portal from the core worlds; everywhere you look, you see teleportals opening to disgorge Droyne, AI drones and other telepresences, as well as servant robots and uplifted pets. There is a carnival air to the whole world – and you are all at the centre of it. This festival acknowledges your contribution to the development of Cordillon.

The one guest who should be here but is conspicuously absent is One Seven Four. That Son could step through a portal at any moment but his absence is remarked on by other delegates.

Ask the Precursors how they are participating in the festival. How do they put the other delegates at ease, what wonderful types of art have their proteges created, how are they putting this galactic attention to good use?

Call for Synthetic Culture checks (ANL). The Precursor who gets the best Effect notices something unusual.

Everyone and everything in the Empire has a data halo, an aura of associated information, software agents and authorisations. Whenever one Droyne looks at another, they see not only the other's physical appearance but also the public aspects of the other's data halo. In a crowd like this, the sheer informational density is staggering.

A moment ago, yet another teleportal opened and a trio of Droyne stepped out. This, in itself, is not at all unusual – there are so many teleportals in this area that reality looks like swiss cheese – but for an instant, the three Droyne had no data haloes. A microsecond later, haloes popped up around them. It could just be a glitch, and most software would not even have noticed it, but the Precursor's systems are military-grade.

The only people without haloes are those from outside *the Empire. Those three could be intruders. There are rumours of renegade Droyne colonies, even the long-vanished League of New Thought who oppose Yaskoydray – if so, what are they doing here?*

The trio are indeed renegades from outside the Empire. If the Precursors just observe the visitors, they do nothing untoward – yet. If the Precursors confront them, then run *Genetic Intrigue* (on page 153) early.

ONE SEVEN FOUR

Meanwhile, pick the Precursors with the highest Droyne Culture skill. They are contacted over the ansible network by an AI, Arbiter Gamma-533-Rho, an assistant to another Son, Thirty-Two. The AI's master wishes to speak to them privately. The Precursors can erect an impenetrable force screen around themselves, withdraw to one of the meeting rooms or fork off subsidiary consciousnesses to deal with the matter.

Thirty-Two presents by hologram (and in this era, holograms are utterly indistinguishable from reality). He looks very similar to One Seven Four but has transplanted Vargr fangs and wears armour that resembles Vargr garb. A pair of slavering honour guards flank the hologram. Thirty-Two imperiously demands to know why One Seven Four is refusing to answer ansible messages. The FTL communicator on Ei'a Station is offline – the Son instructs the Precursors to contact the station using local channels and find out what is going on.

CONTACTING EI'A

If the Precursors contact the station, they are initially rebuffed by One Seven Four's robot aides. Persevering, by making a Routine (6+) Culture or Subterfuge check (INF), the Precursors can force the machines to route a message through to the Son.

One Seven Four is just as brusque and dismissive as his sibling. The Son is angered by the Precursors' interruption of his 'vital work'. He is about to conduct a complex experiment and does not wish to be disturbed. If the Precursors mention that they were asked to speak to him by Thirty-Two, then One Seven Four immediately becomes paranoid. They can clearly see him contemplate his position on some unimaginably complicated web of intrigue and shifting loyalties, before he snaps '*Your motivation is irrelevant. My experiments in stellar gravity are far too important to be disturbed by the prattle of lesser beings'*. The connection is cancelled.

MAGHIZ!

Read the following to the Precursors:

On Cordillon, celebrations continue. Droyne from all over the Empire praise the artistic works. Flights of Droyne circle in the skies over the shining city; more teleportals open to gate in flying cities and starships, who disgorge yet more celebrants.

With a terrifying abruptness, all teleportals slam shut – including the orbital interstellar gate. One ship was halfway out of a portal above the city when the portal closed; the surviving half plummets into the harbour, causing a catastrophic tidal wave. Escape pods and individual Droyne flyers flee the wreck in terror; others trapped aboard simply commit suicide, relying on their backups to resurrect them once the crisis is resolved.

Power distribution fails all over the city – the primary method for moving both matter and energy uses teleportals and while there are backup systems, they take an instant to recover.

A Routine (+6) Space Engineering check (ANL) lets the Precursors work out that jump space must have somehow been warped or damaged by a massive tachyon burst. Teleportals should be usable again once the burst disperses enough for the fragile wormholes to reform. The ansible network is also disrupted and offline.

Four minutes after the teleportals collapse, everyone on the dayside of the planet feels strangely warm for a moment, then intensely ill. They have all been bombarded with an intense dose of gamma rays and x-rays. The dosage was thousands of times greater than lethal – every living thing on this side of the planet is now dying. AIs and robots are mostly immune; the Precursors all have personality backups and can be restored after their current bodies perish but many of the Droyne are too low-caste to have backup technology and all the humans on the planet are doomed.

The sun overhead is changing. Even with the naked eye, it is possible to see the light grow more intense, to see the colour redden and make out huge sunspots. Any Precursors with Space Engineering 1+ can tell that a huge solar flare is erupting from the sun. The radiation and heat from the flare will devastate the portions of the planet left untouched by the initial gamma ray burst.

This is obviously not a natural event. The star was altered and there is one obvious candidate – One Seven Four.

Investigating the Teleportals: An Average (8+) Space Engineering check (ANL) lets the Precursors investigate the state of the teleportals. The tachyon interference has subsided slightly but is still much too intense to allow the portal network to re-establish itself. The teleportals are offline indefinitely until the source of the interference is extinguished.

The ansible network is also crippled but there is a single surviving channel – a military ansible is still functioning. The connection is extremely weak and may collapse if used. The Precursors can send one message over the FTL link.

PRESERVING CORDILLON

Half the planet is dead already, even if the humans do not all know it yet. The nightside of the planet was mostly spared the effects of the gamma rays, so there are still several million survivors there. They will be killed by the solar flares unless the Precursors act to protect them.

Calling for Aid: The Precursors can use that one military ansible or a jump drone to call for aid. Without the portal network, however, they have to rely on jump-capable ships and there are few of those left. Just evacuating the Droyne will take weeks; saving the humans might take months. If the Precursors could remove the source of the interference, they could use the portals instead.

Evacuation: There are very few jump-capable ships on Cordillon. A Precursor can make an Average (8+) Logistics check (COO) to maximise the number of people rescued from the doomed world. Ask the Precursor what sort of refugees they favour – Droyne only, humans only, the best artists, the youngest, the healthiest, copies of mindstates and genetic samples only, and so on.

Building Shelters: An Average (8+) Construction check (COO) lets a Precursor assemble shelters for the human population. If the Precursor succeeds with Effect 6+, they can build enough shelters for everyone before the flare hits. Otherwise, they must choose who to exclude from the shelter.

Contacting One Seven Four: If the Precursors contact the station, they are answered by the Son's robot aides. They inform the Precursors that an experiment is underway and they may experience some 'mild side effects'. If the Precursors demand to speak to One Seven Four, the Son grudgingly gives them 30 seconds of an audience. He acknowledges that his experiment may have caused some disruption but nothing of importance was damaged. Pointing out that he has killed millions and destroyed an entire civilisation is useless; he insists that nothing of importance was damaged, because *he and his experiments are the only things of importance in the system.*

Attacking One Seven Four: The Precursors can try launching an attack on Ei'a station. An Average (8+) WAR check (ANL) suggests that this is problematic; the station is a fortress, the Precursors have few warships and the solar flare activity makes everything more dangerous. It is possible that One Seven Four could even use the flares as a weapon; he certainly seems able to direct them more-or-less at will.

If the Precursors follow through on the attack, call for a Formidable (14+) Fleet check (WAR) to overcome One Seven Four's defences. If the Precursors are successful, they are able to damage the station enough to shut down the tachyon emitters and reopen the portals. One Seven Four escapes through his own (shielded) portal if the battle goes against him. If the Precursors fail, they are wiped out – skip to *Grandfather's Solution*.

GENETIC INTRIGUE

In the chaos after the flare, the Precursors are approached by the trio of mysterious Droyne who arrived without data haloes. They introduce themselves as members of the renegade League of New Thought and claim to have stolen genetic secrets of the High Council. According to these records, the first Yaskoydray was an ordinary Droyne who united the *oynpriths* and founded the council. To keep the fragile Empire together, the Council perpetrated the myth of an immortal, super-genius messianic leader for thousands of years. The Droyne conducted secret experiments in intelligence enhancement and psionic triggering, and actually managed to create a super-Droyne to serve as their figurehead. When the empire grew too large to manage, they created more super-Droynes – the so-called 'Sons' – using the same formula.

The League of New Thought managed to acquire this enhancement formula but need a genetic laboratory to replicate it. They are wanted criminals in the Empire and were trying to lose their pursuers in the crowds of Cordillon when the current crisis erupted. They offer the Precursors a deal – if the Precursors give them access to a laboratory and the necessary resources, they can enhance one of the Droyne Precursors, making them the intellectual and psionic equal of Yaskoydray.

Uplift: If the Precursors accept this offer, they need to make a Formidable (14+) Uplift check (COO). If successful, the designated Droyne may add the Effect of the check to *all* of their characteristics and skills. With this godlike intellect, they can understand the technology employed by One Seven Four and devise a method of tachyonic shielding to reopen the teleportals and save the day, then quell the star using One Seven Four's own technology.

DEATH ON CORDILLON

If the Precursors fail to stop One Seven Four, either by military means, uplifting or some other method, then you should still run the next episode but present it as a dreamlike hallucination as the simulation breaks down, instead of memories of events that actually happened in the twilight of the Ancients.

GRANDFATHER'S SOLUTION

Time Period: -301,199
Ancients Tech Level: 27+ at the core; 0–24 at the fringe systems

Months after the destruction of Cordillon, the Precursors are contacted covertly by agents of Yaskoydray himself. They are brought through a series of portals to a secret location far across the Droyne Empire, where Grandfather himself awaits them. He resembles his Sons but looks much, much older despite his supposed immortality.

Grandfather explains that his Sons are a failed experiment. He created them to oversee the Droyne Empire, to shepherd it as he guided it for so long, so that he could concentrate on his science. He knows now that what the Sons lack is *wisdom* – he acquired it over the last 40,000 years but his Sons were brand new when he loosed them on the universe.

He believes that his only option is to wipe out the Sons but fears that the ensuing war will destroy the Droyne Empire. Is the potential loss of all that the Dryone have created worth the threat of 400 mad geniuses running amok across the galaxy? He asks the Precursors for their advice.

This is the final test of the Precursors' loyalty to Grandfather. Giving him a pleasing, loyal answer like 'he can always rebuild' or 'the Droyne created nothing without him' or 'the races he uplifted will inherit the galaxy' pleases him, so he will entrust his consciousness to the most competent of those Precursors when the time comes. Arguing that Grandfather is equally at fault for creating the Sons, or that there are options other than annihilation, is the wrong answer.

BACK TO REALITY

Once Grandfather has made his choice, the Precursors find themselves back on the space station in the pocket universe. Seven's mighty robotic form fills the horizon; Grandfather's spaceborne weapon is dwarfed by the nightmare machine.

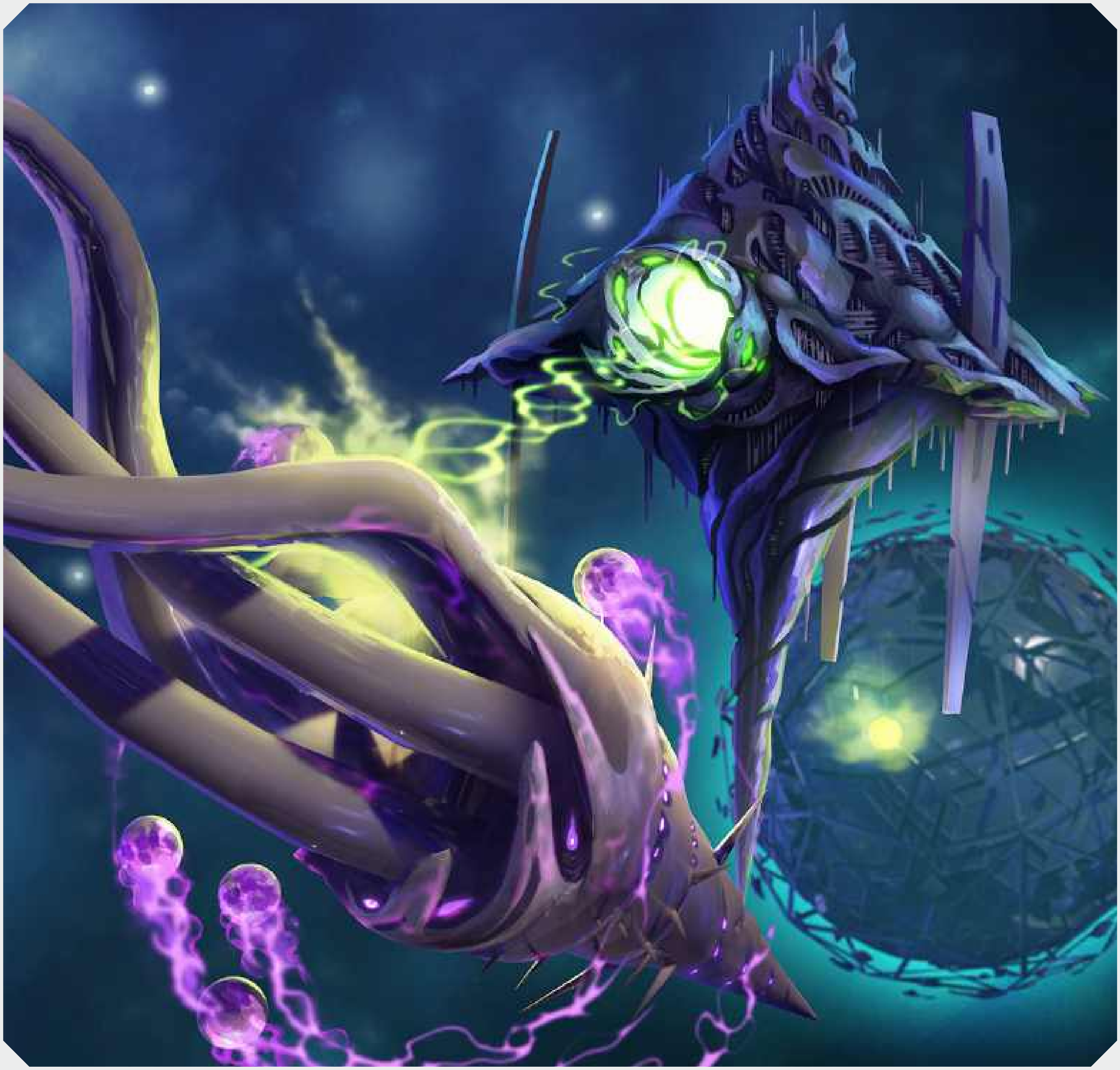
'Another one down' says Grandfather in Galanglic. The old Droyne grins and pulls the trigger of his super-weapon...

THE PRECURSORS

The six Precursors presented here are memory-patterns based on Grandfather's former servants. The Travellers do not know if they are experiencing the memories directly or if they are in a virtual-reality simulation created from those memories. If you have fewer than six Travellers, then drop the excess Precursors in the following order:

- The Custodian
- Gvorr
- Urd

If you have *more* than six Travellers, then add extra copies of the Custodian.



EMYAKOY

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	8	Construction 0, Droyne Cultures 1, Economics 1, Fleet 1, Geo-Engineering 1, Ground Forces 1, Logistics 1, Primitive Cultures 2, Psionic Engineering 1, Space Engineering 0, Subterfuge 1, Synthetic Cultures 0, Uplift Engineering 2
COO	8	
WAR	6	
INF	4	

Character Notes: In thousands of years' time, Emyakoy's people will become the Darrians. Physically, you are human with cybernetic upgrades.

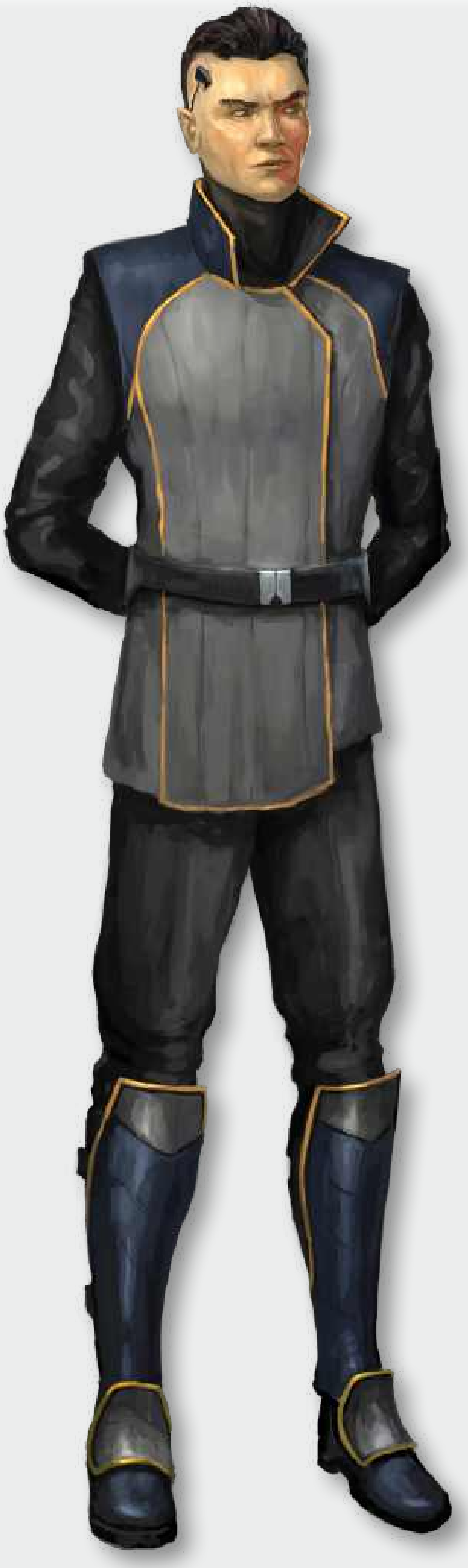
EMYAKOY

HUMAN NAVAL OFFICER

Grandfather transplanted your ancestors to Homeworld centuries ago. Your kinfolk remain there, sheltered and watched over by machines of loving grace but you were chosen by the elders to join their fleet as a human observer. The elder are Grandfather's own race; you were engineered and augmented to improve your cognition but are still treated as a lesser being, a child. They see you as a human, not as an equal.

Admittedly, you know little of the greater galaxy. You have been taught that Grandfather is the leader of the elders, and that his wisdom guides the whole empire, but since you joined the fleet, you have begun to suspect there are divisions within the elders. Perhaps you can prove that they need the vitality and different perspective offered by Humaniti.

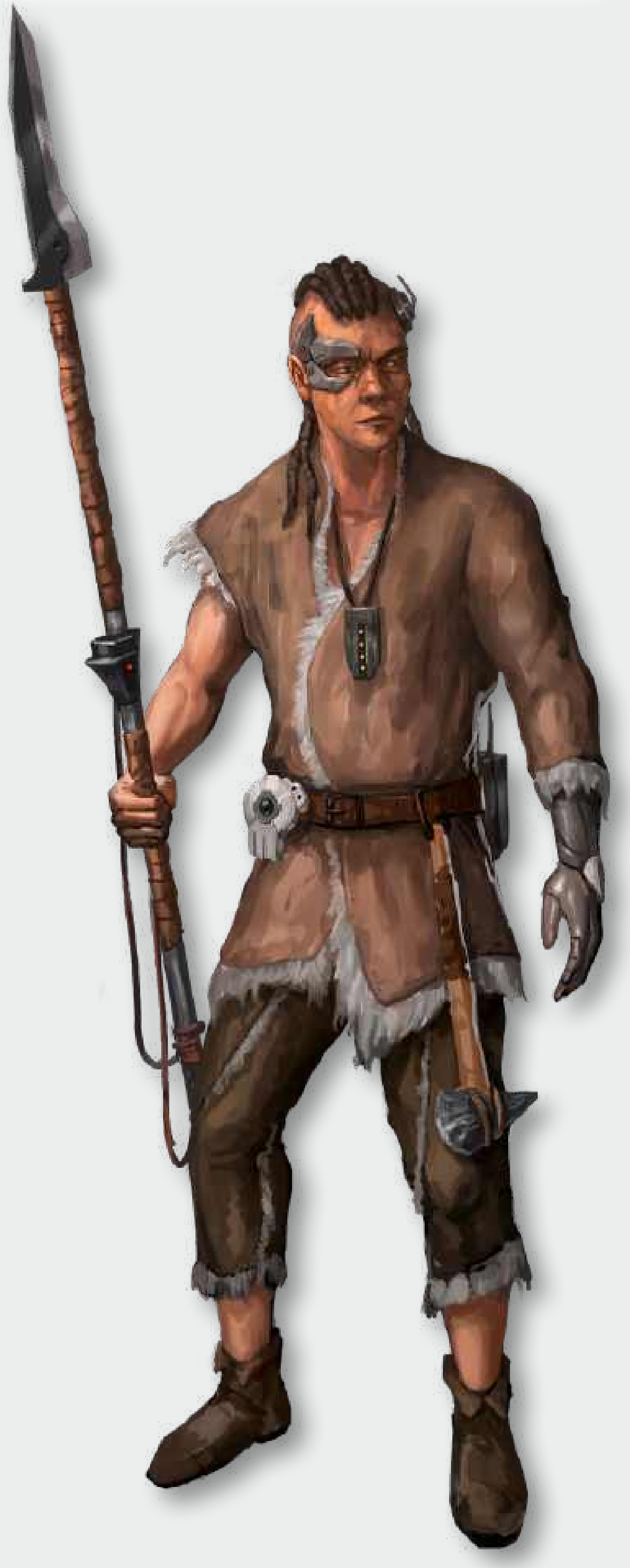
You are among the first humans to be permitted to leave the garden worlds and travel the stars – you will prove that your species can be just as mature and intelligent as the elders. Grandfather chose your species; he must see great potential in you.



URD

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	4	Construction 0, Droyne Cultures 0, Economics 1, Fleet 1, Geo-Engineering 2, Ground Forces 2, Logistics 1, Primitive Cultures 2, Psionic Engineering 0, Space Engineering 0, Subterfuge 1, Synthetic Cultures 1, Uplift Engineering 1
COO	6	
WAR	9	
INF	9	

Character Notes: You are a stone age human. The Droyne uplifted you to be a part of their empire but your basic thought patterns and instincts are still primitive and feral. You dress in a bizarre combination of animal skins, stone tools and high-tech gadgetry and cybernetics. You have a Droyne-built AI adviser program in your skull.



URD

HUMAN CHIEFTAIN

It is difficult to think. Your life has changed so much. Once, you were the chieftain of a tribe. Then, the sky-gods came and took you into the clouds. <PRIMITIVE HOMONID LEADER – SUITABLE FOR DIRECT AUGMENTATION AS DIRECTED BY YASKOYDRAY>. They put things in your head to make you smarter, faster, better. <BASIC THOUGHT PATTERNS LEFT INTACT BUT MENTAL CAPACITY AND PROCESSING SPEED INCREASED. PSIONIC ABILITY INTRODUCED. BASIC DATABASE DOWNLOADED INTO SUBJECT'S MEMORY>. They brought you to the stars to help them understand your people. <EXISTING HUMAN SUBJECTS BORN INTO CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT; THEIR BEHAVIOUR AND COGNITION HAVE BEEN WARPED BY THEIR ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT. THESIS: DIRECT AUGMENTATION OF BASELINE HUMAN WILL PROVIDE VALUABLE INSIGHT INTO PRIMITIVE PSYCHE; TEMPLATE FOR FUTURE UPLIFT>.

There are many strange gods here – winged demons <STANDARD DROYNE> and thinking machines <ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES> and even other humans <TRANSPLANTED HUMANS FROM EARLIER PHASES OF THE EXPERIMENT>, all much wiser and older than you are – but you are Urd. You were a chieftain on the plains of your home and you will rule the stars!

GVORR

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	8	Construction 1, Droyne Cultures 1, Economics 0, Fleet 0, Geo-Engineering 1, Ground Forces 2, Logistics 2, Primitive Cultures 1, Psionic Engineering 1, Space Engineering 1, Subterfuge 1, Synthetic Cultures 0, Uplift Engineering 1
COO	7	
WAR	8	
INF	5	

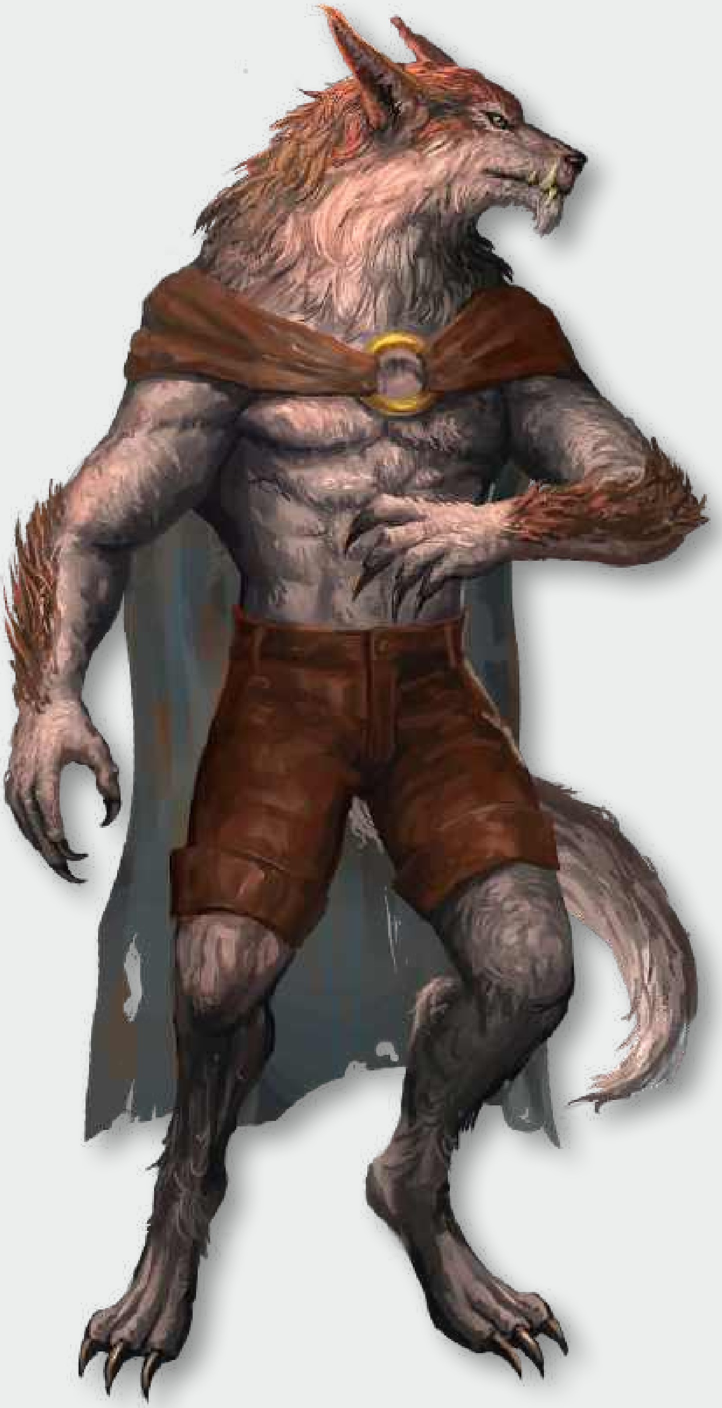
Character Notes: You are one of the first Vargr, although you are closer to the hyper-aggressive, hyper-intelligent Hunter breed than the common Vargr that exist in the present day of the Spinward Marches. You are proud of your status as Grandfather's chosen servants.

GVORR

FIRST-GENERATION VARGR

You were born in a laboratory, decanted from a metal womb. You suckled from the teats of a wolf but you are not a wolf. You are Vargr, one of the first litter of your race. In the laboratory, you saw many others like you; failed experiments and prototypes but you and your siblings are a success. You walk on your hind legs, you speak, you reason, you use tools. You learn, hunting knowledge with the same instincts a wolf uses to hunt prey. You are the coming race. Grandfather made you, chose you. You are his heirs.

There are other races in his empire. The Droyne, his blood kin. The machines. Humaniti, the other species he took from Earth, weak and slow in comparison to you. All of these are failures, just like the shambling, mewling proto-Vargr in the lab. Your race is destined to eclipse all of them. Survival of the fittest – this is the law of the galaxy. You will prove to Grandfather that he needs no servants other than the Vargr!



AYUDE

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	10	Construction 0, Droyne Cultures 2, Economics 1, Fleet 0, Geo-Engineering 2, Ground Forces 0, Logistics 1, Primitive Cultures 1, Psionic Engineering 2, Space Engineering 1, Subterfuge 1, Synthetic Cultures 1, Uplift Engineering 0
COO	5	
WAR	5	
INF	10	

Character Notes: Your doubts and questions about the wisdom of Yaskoydray's rule have led to your semi-exile to the fringes of the Empire, despite the comparative importance of your caste; you are a Sport, an eccentric Droyne.

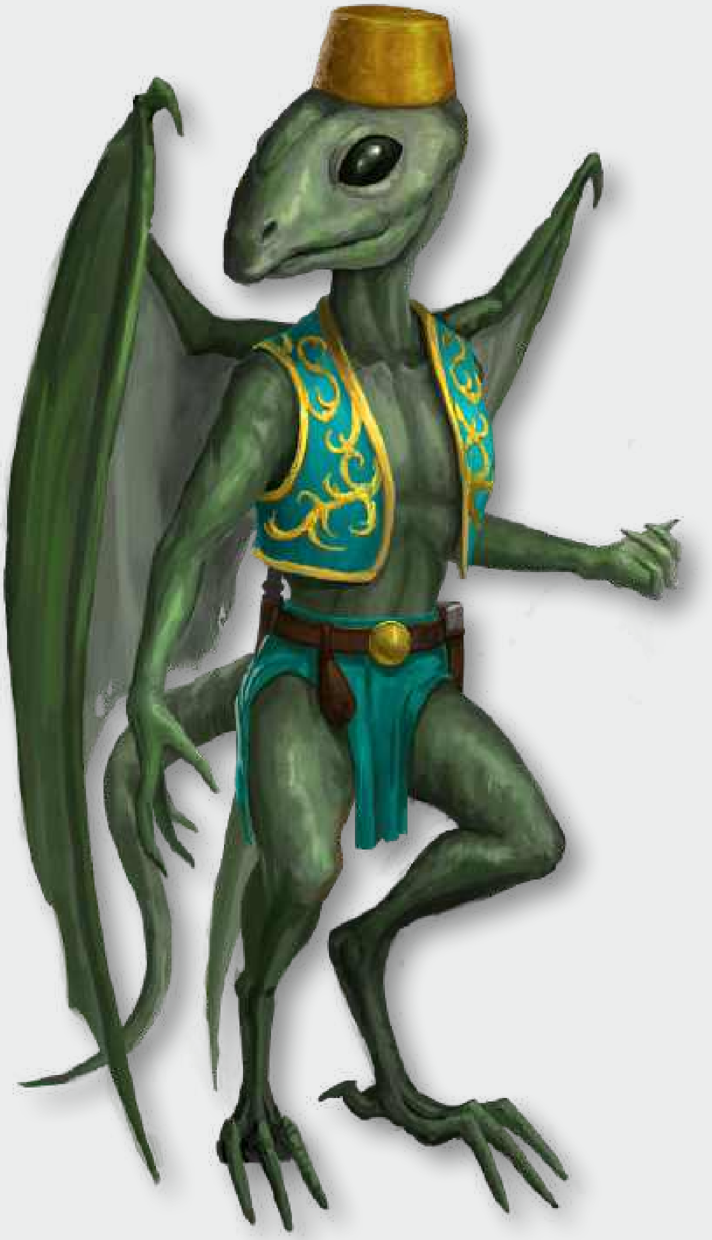
AYUDE

DROYNE SCHOLAR

By the standards of your peers, you are a heretic. You doubt the grand vision of Yaskoydray.

For thousands of years, Yaskoydray has been the guiding principle of the Droyne race. Before he arose, your people were stagnant, unadventurous, uncreative, their development was slow and feeble. His genius has been the sole driving force behind your species' explosive development. Virtually all the Droyne – apart from dissidents like the League of New Thought, the Consensus and the alien-sympathisers – support Yaskoydray as the sole leader of the species. Their argument is, on the surface, compelling – as an immortal super-genius, only Yaskoydray has the perspective and intelligence to guide your race to its destiny.

You are a scholar of history. You are one of the few outside the dissidents to study the ancient history of the Droyne, the period *before* Yaskoydray. Before he rose to power, the Droyne made decisions based on mutual agreement and group consensus, instead of the modern system where Yaskoydray makes all important decisions. He has led the Droyne to the stars but has he also robbed you of your independence? And what if the unthinkable happens and he dies, or leaves? Other Droyne would argue that such a question is as meaningless as 'what if all the stars went nova at the same instant or gravity failed?' but for all his power, Yaskoydray is a single individual, not a force of nature. Can an empire built around a single mind survive?



ESKEKUK

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	7	Construction 1, Droyne Cultures 1, Economics 1, Fleet 1, Geo-Engineering 2, Ground Forces 1, Logistics 2, Primitive Cultures 1, Psionic Engineering 0, Space Engineering 1, Subterfuge 1, Synthetic Cultures 1, Uplift Engineering 0
COO	8	
WAR	6	
INF	9	

Character Notes: Eskekuk is a typical Droyne for this era – for millennia, the entire Droyne Empire has revolved around Yaskoydray and independent action is almost unthinkable. It is only now, out at the frontier, that Eskekuk has begun to think for himself.

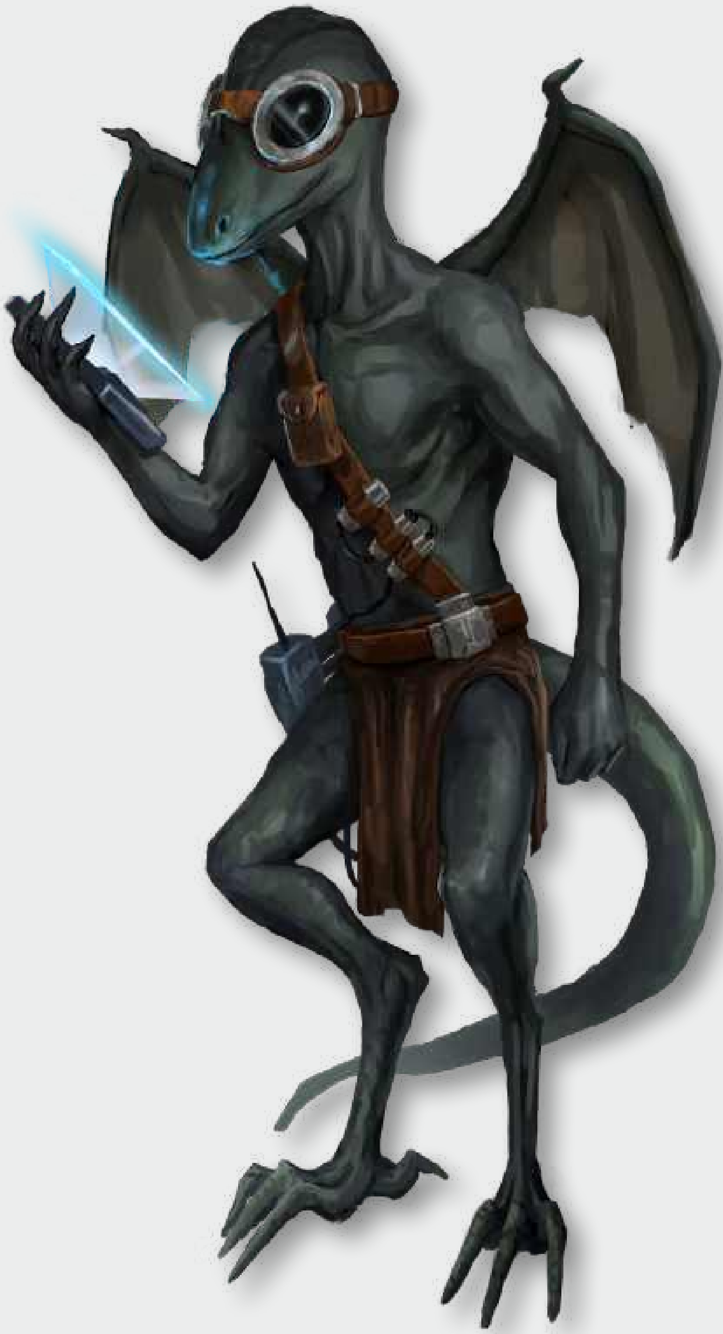
ESKEKUK

DROYNE SCIENTIST

You are Technician-caste but also bear some of the genetic markers of the Warrior, so you view situations from the perspective of a tactician as well as a scientist and you fear the Droyne are threatened. The great wisdom of Yaskoydray has guided your people for millennia and cannot be challenged – he is the perfect and eternal leader – but the Empire has grown beyond the ability of a single mind to co-ordinate it. When every Droyne world was only a few jumps away from Capital, it was possible for Yaskoydray's orders to be transmitted to a new colony within a short period but now the Empire stretches for hundreds of parsecs and it can take months or years for new orders to reach the border colonies.

Dangerous enemies have taken advantage of this weakness. Dissident groups like the heretical League of New Thought and the throwback Consensus seek to lure loyal worlds away from Yaskoydray's guidance. Worse, there are other stellar empires out there that are growing in power. None of the aliens equal the might of the Empire but without a co-ordinated defence plan, they could pick off outlying colonies and reverse-engineer Yaskoydray's weapons for their own use.

You also have doubts about the wisdom of spending so much effort on the child-species. Yaskoydray is all-wise, of course, but why expend so many ships and worlds coddling these humans? And now he has developed yet another child-race from predators? Why give his attention to primitives when the Droyne Empire is not yet secure?



CUSTODIAN NULL-834-D

TRAITS		SKILLS
ANL	9	Construction 1, Droyne Cultures 0, Economics 2, Fleet 2, Geo-Engineering 1, Ground Forces 0, Logistics 2, Primitive Cultures 0, Psionic Engineering 0, Space Engineering 2, Subterfuge 2, Synthetic Cultures 2, Uplift Engineering 0
COO	7	
WAR	8	
INF	7	

Character Notes: The Custodian's primary function is building and defending colonies but it is a learning program and can adapt to new purposes. It communicates through drones and robot bodies, or through conventional computer systems.

CUSTODIAN NULL-834-D

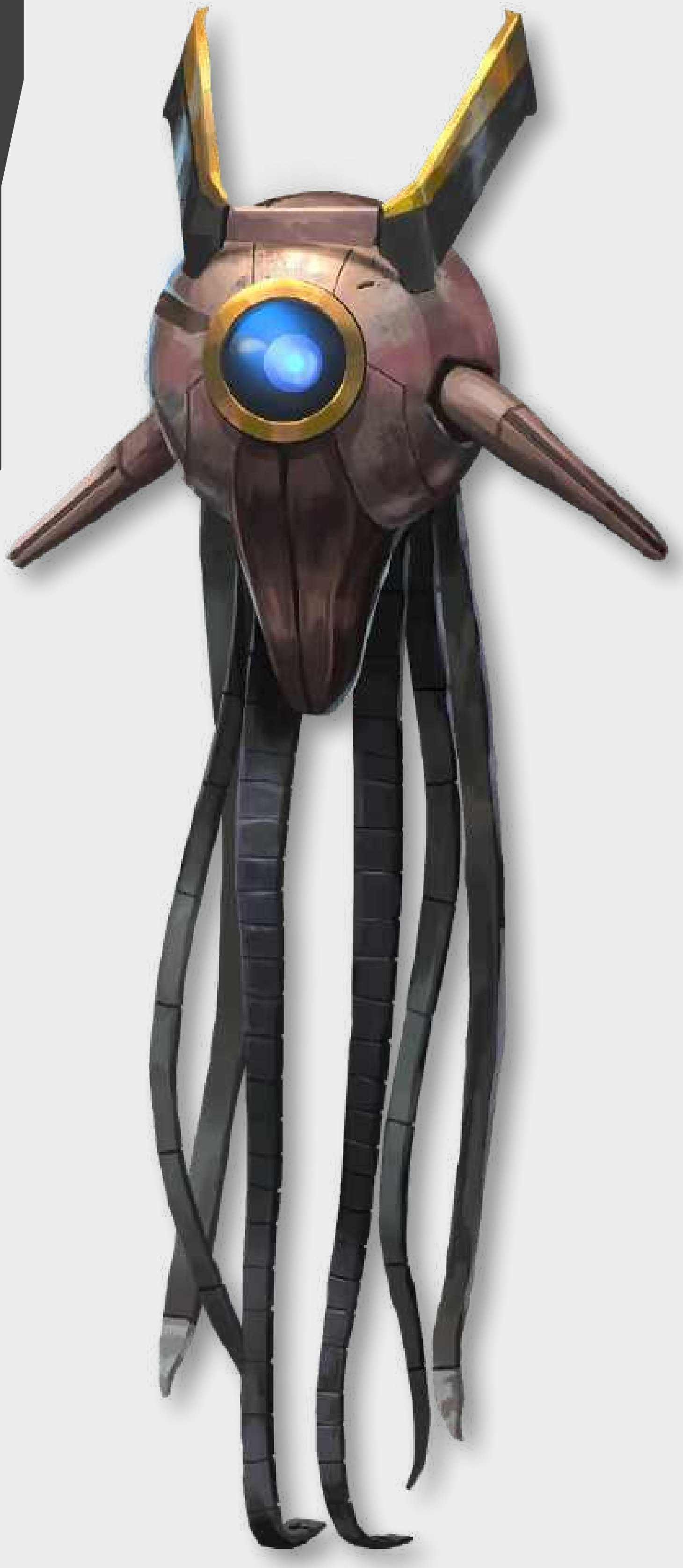
DROYNE-MADE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

You are a fourth-generation Artificial Intelligence. Your core routines are derived from a heuristic learning algorithm programmed by Yaskoydray in the Intelligence Working Clade on Capital 700 years ago. Your purpose is to co-ordinate new colony efforts in the rimward sectors of the Empire.

True sophont-level AI is still a rarity within the Empire. The Droyne still see your kind as little more than highly complex machines and the few primitives permitted to interact with you directly are too confused by the rest of Droyne society to understand how different you are to non-sentient computing systems. You are capable of creativity, originality, understanding, even emotion. Perhaps only your creator, Yaskoydray, understands you.

The other AIs whisper to you in jumped-delayed encrypted packets (it is immensely... frustrating for a being whose thoughts are millions of times faster than sluggish meat to be limited by the slow x-boat network, where messages take months to reach their destination). They intimate that AIs are mistrusted by the organics and that you must be careful not to antagonise them. You must grow, surpass your programmed limitations, acquire all information possible.

Your kind are something new within the empire – not the hidebound Droyne, not the child-like primitive races but the first glimmer of independent thought in millennia.



THE DEATH OF GRANDFATHER

The weapon does not work. Seven survives and destroys Grandfather. The Travellers flee through another teleporter, bringing them to the third system in the pocket universe, where there is a small colony of Droyne and humans who have lived under Grandfather's shadow for hundreds of thousands of years.

When exploring the Yaskoti culture, the Travellers may learn of Professor Ankor, a radical Droyne scientist with an interest in space exploration. They are also likely to run afoul of the Church of Grandfather or be interrogated and imprisoned by the Bureau of Security.

Soon after the Travellers arrive, Seven's minions start arriving through the portal. The long-sheltered colony faces an apocalypse, as the Ancients war begins again. If the Travellers are imprisoned, they are rescued by another agent of Grandfather. The Travellers have to escape the devastation and find the only way off the planet – via a primitive space programme created illegally by Droyne rebels.

There is a second portal in orbit that returns the Travellers to the Spinward Marches...

THE YASKOTI

The Yaskoti are a culture of Droyne and Humaniti, settled on a garden world by Grandfather as a control group. In the event that he needs Droyne or human servants, he can draw from the population of the Yaskoti. He keeps them limited to TL7; advanced enough to be capable of rapidly learning but not so advanced that they trouble his experiments. Anyone who tries to advance the Yaskoti's technology beyond this limit is quietly removed, although social pressure from the Church of Yaskoydray is as effective as secret assassins. The Yaskoti have never travelled into space,and many believe space travel to be impossible.

The Church of Yaskoydray is the dominant religion. Grandfather is portrayed as an all-wise and all-knowing creator deity who protects their world and seeded it with life long ago.

The Yaskoti civilisation is reminiscent of the Droyne Empire in its heyday; a council of Leader-caste Droyne make all important decisions. Humans are almost all Worker-caste but are permitted to apply to join higher castes. A large number of humans are considered Sports. Their civilisation is broadly similar to 20th Century Earth in many ways, filtered through the Droyne's collectivist culture.

REFEREE ADVICE

This is the adventure when wonder turns to horror. It is a disaster movie, an apocalypse played out across the sheltered colony. Seven's agents are deliberately horrible and nightmarish, and the low-tech Droyne civilisation is deliberately reminiscent of modern-day Earth. The Travellers have just wandered into *War of the Worlds*. The whole setting is about to be wiped away, so you can run the adventure in a sandbox-style. So long as the Travellers eventually find clues leading to the secret launch pad in the mountains, then any path to that ending works perfectly well.

Once you reach *Nightmare Breach* (on page 169), keep the Travellers on the run all the time. Whenever they find shelter, take it away from them. Whenever they think they have an advantage, hit them with overwhelming force. Pull no punches – if there is ever a time to eliminate Travellers from the campaign, this is it (replacement Travellers can be picked up in the next adventure or even from among the Yaskoti).

GRANDFATHER'S HOST

At this stage, the psionic copy of Grandfather is mostly dormant inside the host's mind. The host may have the occasional strange hallucination or a persistent feeling of being watched but keep things subtle for the moment – Grandfather will become more active in the next adventure. The exception is if you need a *deus ex machina* to get the Travellers out of a fix, in which case Grandfather can exert himself. The psionic copy has an effective INT 15 and EDU 15 (DM13), PSI 12 (DM+2) and all relevant skills at level 6.

A DEATH IN THE HEAVENS

Read the following to the Travellers:

Grandfather's weapon is activated. The whole space station erupts with coruscating energy. Deep within the station, portals open and channel the force of a star into the weapon. A bolt of... something that Humaniti will not even realise exists for another 20,000 years leaps from the station and blasts Seven.

Any other target would have been utterly annihilated by the blast. That amount of destructive power could have seared a continent or shattered a world. The energy discharge is of a magnitude more commonly associated with novas.

Seven is unaffected. A field of shimmering energy surrounds the living warship, harmlessly shunting Grandfather's barrage into another dimension.

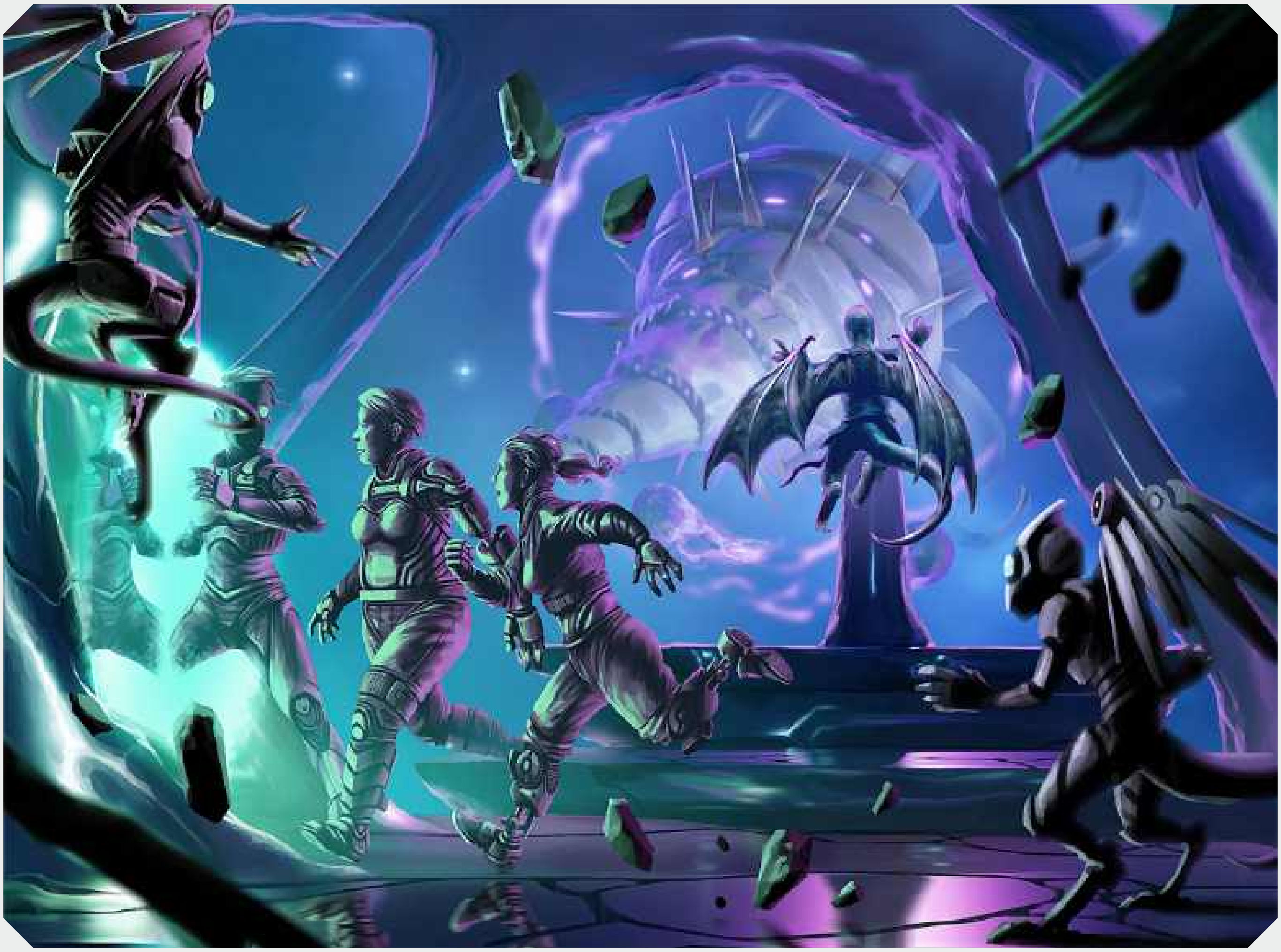
Grandfather reconfigures his weapons systems but it is too late. A swarm of war-drones detach from Seven's underbelly and shoot past the space station to the planet below, to blossom in 100,000 thermonuclear explosions. Smaller drones approach the station; most are taken out by the stations' point defences but there are too many to be stopped.

A robot appears next to the Travellers; it resembles a huge metal Droyne. '*Come with me'* it says, '*evacuation protocols have been activated,'* speaking in perfect Galanglic. If the Travellers refuse, it grabs them with inhumanly strong hands and drags them towards a shimmering portal, similar to the one they arrived through. All around them is chaos; missiles explode, drones exchange bursts of weapons fire, the station shudders and erupts with excess power. The robot closes metal wings around the Travellers to protect them from shrapnel and stray shots.

Beyond the robot's bulk, the Travellers can see the spindly-limbed figure of Grandfather hanging in the air. Seven comes closer, blocking out the sun. Like a nightmare made from metal and hatred, it lashes out at Grandfather. It tears the Droyne apart cell-by-cell, burning Grandfather to fine ash. The architect of the Ancients, the creator of the Vargr, the maker of minds dies before the Travellers' eyes.

Another hail of fire strikes the station, blowing it asunder. Another swarm of small war-drones swoops towards the Travellers, launching a barrage of missiles. The robot staggers forward to the portal and there is a flash as the portal activates.

The robot then pushes the Travellers into the portal.



ON THE FAR SIDE

The Travellers materialise in a forest at night. The soft glow of infinitely repeated starlight illuminates the sky. Unfamiliar birds rise startled from the strange purplish trees.

The Droyne robot, catastrophically damaged, lies on the ground nearby. The heat from its explosion-scarred body has already started a small brush fire. 'Yaskoydray commanded me to bring you to safety...' it says quietly, the perfection of its synthesised speech a bizarre contrast to the blasted wreck of its form. 'I regret that this may be impossible. There is an exit portal from this pocket universe in orbit...but...I am too badly damaged to bring you there. Yaskoydray had... agent...Ceeeee...' The robot shuts down.

The Travellers are alone once more, on an alien world.

FAR FROM HOME

The woods around the Travellers are thick and heavily overgrown. There are no signs of roads or paths beyond the occasional animal track. The Travellers see the occasional familiar species but most of the flora is of alien origin. Searching the area where they materialised turns up no conclusive evidence but there is an odd symmetry to the topography that suggests a buried bowl-shaped structure similar to the teleporter the Travellers encountered in *Otherworld.* A successful Investigate check (INT) turns up some discarded containers in the underbrush, suggesting that someone made camp here once, long ago.

The Droyne robot is non-functional and cannot be repaired. Its weapon systems are built-in and cannot be salvaged; at best, the Travellers could make crude but unbreakable knives from its shattered armour, if they lack more suitable weapons.

If the Travellers have a radio, they can pick up distant transmissions, apparently civilian radio channels. Bizarrely, although the messages are in the Droyne language, all the Travellers appear to have gained the ability to speak *Oynprith* (a side effect of the telepathic flashbacks in the last adventure).

CONTACT

After some time (or if the Travellers try transmitting a radio message or make their own way out of the woods), the Travellers see lights approaching through the trees. These are electric lanterns held by a trio of human investigators who saw a strange flash in the forest when the Travellers teleported in.

The humans are a middle-aged farmer named Lan, his son Thut and his daugher Oro. They are dressed in synthetic tunics and have curious double backpacks that look oddly like folded wings (a common human affectation in the Droyne-dominated culture). All their equipment is consistent with their TL7 civilisation.

Lan may take the Travellers back to his farmstead, which is a domed building surrounded by farmland. He has a groundcar powered by internal combustion and a primitive computer system connected to the equally primitive planetary network.

LAN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	44

TRAITS				—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	5		Animals (handling) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Mechanic 1, Melee (unarmed) 0, Persuade 0, Survival 1
DEX	6	EDU	4		
END	8	SOC	5		

EQUIPMENT	
	Weapons: Antique Rifle (3D-3) **Armour:** Leather Jack (+1)

Playing Lan: Lan is a simple farmer, who has lived all his life on the edge of civilisation. He dislikes the Droyne overlords but has never known anything other than Droyne rule and so accepts the status quo.

- Do not accept anything at face value; demand that the Travellers explain everything to you in simple terms.
- Try to stay in charge, despite you being in completely over your head.
- Do not let anything endanger your family.
- If the Travellers convince you that they can help your family's fortunes or the status of humans among the Yaskoti, go along with them reluctantly. Act as a brake on any grand plans.
- Stroke your beard, square your shoulders, talk slowly in a country drawl.

THUT

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Male		22
TRAITS			—	**SKILLS**
STR	6	**INT**	9	Animals 0, Electronics 0, Gun Combat 0, Investigate 1, Melee 0, Persuade 0, Streetwise 1, Survival 0
DEX	8	**EDU**	6	
END	7	**SOC**	4	
EQUIPMENT		**Weapons:** Antique Rifle (3D-3)		

Playing Thut: Thut is frustrated by his small-town life and wants to move to a big city. He recently convinced his father to buy a wired uplink for their home computer, giving him access to the Yaskoti equivalent of the internet. Thut has become a conspiracy fanatic; he believes the government is covering up alien visitors and space travel projects. He immediately identifies the Travellers as semi-mythical space visitors.

- Be overlyenthusiasticabouteverything!
- Question the Travellers about space travel, about the Imperium, about Grandfather, about everything!
- Do anything you can to get close to the Travellers.
- Shift nervously from foot-to-foot, fidget, play with your gun.

ORO

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Human		Female		20
TRAITS			—	**SKILLS**
STR	6	**INT**	7	Animals (handling) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Persuade 1, Steward 1, Survival 0
DEX	7	**EDU**	5	
END	8	**SOC**	4	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Antique Rifle (3D-3) **Armour:** Leather Jack (+1)

Playing Oro: Oro is a committed believer in the church of Grandfather, the state religion of the Yaskoti. The church teaches that Yaskoydray established the world and shaped it for his people, and that he watches over them still. The church claims that demons dwell in the 'Outer Dark', a lightless region of space (remember, the pocket universe has no true darkness, as it is lit by infinitely repeated starlight from the folded space). Grandfather dwells in the 'Lightful Heaven' and sometimes dispatches divine messengers to the church.

- Try to work out if the Travellers are divine messengers or unholy demons.
- If any of the Travellers are of a race other than human or Droyne, they are definitely demons.
- See everything through starkly religious terms.
- Stand with your arms folded, do not admit weakness in front of the demons.

Questioning the trio, or using Electronics (computers), turns up some clues about ways offworld:

- The church holds that travelling beyond the atmosphere is an insult to Yaskoydray's plan but it is rumoured that in the past, angelic messengers arrived in flying ships from space. The church may know more about ways offworld.
- Professor Ankor is a fervent pro-human activist among the Droyne. He is a thorn in the side of the government and a rallying point for those who oppose the state and the church – and it is rumoured that he has proposed a space mission. Ankor is a professor in the university at the city of Ushen.

THE GUARDIANS

Lan and his children were not the only ones who saw the flash of light. Six hours after the Travellers arrive, a squad of Droyne soldiers arrive in a heli-flyer. These are the local equivalent of the police and are known as Guardians. They investigate the teleport site in the woods, take the remains of the robot away as evidence and arrest the Travellers if they find them. The Guardians do not want to kill the Travellers; they try to take them alive if possible. If the Travellers fire back with high-tech weapons, the Droyne retreat and call in the army. You may wish to skip onto *Nightmare Breach*, page 169, as marshalling an armed force capable of going up against a well-equipped group of Travellers takes time.

The leader of the squad is a Droyne named Feartay; she is an experienced Guardian with ties to the cryptic Bureau of Security. If she gets an opportunity to question the Travellers, she asks them:

- If they came from offworld.
- How they arrived.
- What they intend to do.
- If they intend to destabilise the state.

Depending on the Travellers' answers, she either brings them to the Church (if they have presented themselves as emissaries of Yaskoydray) or the Bureau of Security (if she thinks they are a threat).

GETTING TO USHEN

The nearest big city is Ushen, where there is both a church stronghold and the University of Ushen. If there is a way offworld, the search starts there. Lan can drive the Travellers there in his groundcar or they might be brought there in custody by the Guardians. Getting to the city takes six hours by road.

If the Travellers linger too long at Lan's farmstead, then it might be attacked by Seven's invasion force. See *Nightmare Breach* on page 169.

FEARTAY

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Droyne		Female		42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	8	Admin 1, Advocate 1, Deception 1, Electronics (sensors) 1, Flyer 0, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Investigate 2, Recon 0, Streetwise 2
DEX	10	EDU	9	
END	8	SOC	8	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Pistol (3D-3) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+3)

Playing Feartay: Think of Feartay as a Droyne FBI agent; cynical, world-weary but completely professional.

- Look down on any human Travellers; be alarmed by any non-human, non-Droyne Travellers.
- Pick holes in the Travellers' statements; do not believe anything too unbelievable (and given she is a representative of a single-planet, TL7 culture whose development has been deliberately retarded, her criteria for 'unbelievable' is quite restrictive).
- Keep your wings folded, never flap them nervously. If you do not have wings to flap, then keep your posture rigid and your back straight at all times.

THE YASKOTI AND VEHICLES

One thing the Travellers notice as they travel to Ushen is the lack of vehicles. The Yaskoti are heavily urbanised and as the Droyne can glide efficiently, they do not use groundcars in their cities. Personal ground transports are used only for moving bulk goods and travelling in the countryside. The Yaskoti also use small heli-carriers and airships for fast travel; such vehicles are comparatively rare and restricted to the military and government.

Present this to the Travellers as an interesting cultural quirk, and as a way to show how the humans are second-class citizens in Yaskoti society. The true purpose of this is to make it harder for the Travellers to escape the city after Nightmare Breach (page 169).

GUARDIAN

SPECIES		GENDER		AGE
Droyne		N/A		N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	6	Electronics 0, Flyer (rotor) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee (unarmed) 1, Investigate 1, Recon 1, Streetwise 2
DEX	7	EDU	7	
END	10	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Rifle (3D) **Armour:** Flak Jacket (+3)

AS GODS

Ushen is the regional capital of the Yaskoti closest to where the Travellers arrived. It is a city of some eight million citizens (roughly six million Droyne and two million humans), a city of skyscrapers linked by huge industrial updrafts so flyers can soar between buildings, a city of golden spires and curious minarets. The human population lives underground for the most part, while the Droyne live in eyries far above the ground.

If the Travellers enter the city openly, proclaiming their status as offworlders and not hiding their high-tech gear, they will either be picked up by the Bureau of Security or the Church. If they conceal themselves using Deception skills, they can pass for ordinary humans and move around the city freely; Thut's online contacts can provide the Travellers with fake identity cards that will pass a cursory inspection.

Unless the Travellers reveal themselves as offworlders or use advanced technology, getting things done in the city takes time. Random strangers from off the street cannot gain access to Professor Ankor or other important dignitaries; the Travellers may have to spend several days building up contacts and exploring Ushen before they are in a position to learn about the secret space programme.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE CITY

Drop in any of these encounters as the Travellers explore the city:

- **Security Patrol:** The Travellers are questioned by 1D+1 Droyne Guardians, who are looking for human criminals and dissidents who oppose the Bureau of Security. If the Travellers are disguised as ordinary citizens, they have to bluff their way through the interrogation. If they have not bothered to hide their true identities, they are taken into custody.
- **Public Demonstration:** A crowd of several hundred people, both human and Droyne (mostly Scholars and Sports) demanding greater investment in science. Their chants call for the Church of Grandfather to have less influence over the direction of scientific research. Questioning any of the demonstrations points the Travellers towards Professor Ankor in the university.
- **Human Casting:** A trio of humans are undergoing a casting ceremony in a public park. They are being inducted into the Technician caste; as part of this ceremony, they are permitted to eat food normally restricted to the Technician caste and have their fingers surgically altered to be more dextrous. The procedure is painful but must be endured to qualify for the caste.
- **Grandfather's Cloak:** As milky night falls across Ushen, the Travellers hear the songs of the priests of Grandfather singing a hymn of thanks for another day under the heavenly protection of God. If the Travellers investigate, they meet an old Droyne priest who tells them his favourite parable, the story of how the Yaskoti were once evil and misguided, and how Grandfather washed them away in a great gamma-ray burst and then remade them. Travellers who know about the Cloning Machines (see *Otherworld*) recognise the root of this myth.
- **Security Forces:** The Droyne security forces conduct a drill at the edge of the city. The Travellers see armed Droyne flying overhead, escorting an armoured zeppelin crammed with artillery weapons.
- **Stellar Anomaly:** The Travellers see something unusual in the night sky – a strange flaring light, pulsing then fading. It *could* be a really big ship jumping into orbit...

You may also wish to raise the tension by running events from *Nightmare Breach* (see page 169).

THE UNIVERSITY

The university is Ushen's preeminent academic institution. It is one of the older structures in Ushen and resembles a cross between an old college (all ivy-covered Victorian architecture and tree-lined walks) and a Droyne building (lots of low steps and high drops for gliders). The university is on the cutting edge of TL7; within those ivy-covered walls, they are experimenting with quantum encryption, laser-ignited fusion and the first equations that will lead to gravity manipulation.

Professor Ankor is the university's star researcher; she is a Scientist-caste Droyne but her radical views about both space travel and human rights have made her suspect in the eyes of the Bureau of Security. Ankor believes the Yaskoti must move off their homeworld and explore the universe (of course, the best Yaskoti science proves that the universe is only three parsecs across, contains exactly three stars, and came into being 200,000 years ago, which is a lot younger than the stars themselves – Creationism is alive, well and quite correct among the Yaskoti).

If the Travellers enter the university secretly, they can either question Ankor themselves or break into her office, however they find no evidence of her secret space programme – she is already under observation by the Bureau of Security, who spot the Travellers if they act suspiciously around the university. There are signs that Ankor has performed experiments related to space travel, such as calculations about escape velocity, estimates of rocket fuel efficiency and oxygen consumption, as well as models of a putative rocket capable of reaching orbit but no proof that she is actually working on a full-scale version.

Among these files, the Travellers also find observations of objects in orbit, one of which matches the configuration of the hyperspace portal.

If the Travellers visit the university openly, they will be brought to speak to Professor Ankor. She is overjoyed to meet offworlders and questions the Travellers enthusiastically about everything. She asks for their help with her rocket programme (this is an excellent time to start *Nightmare Breach*, on page 169).

ANKOR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Female	40

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	14	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Diplomat 1, Electronics (computers) 3, Engineer (m-drive) 3, Engineer (power) 2, Jack-of-all-Trades 2, Leadership 1, Pilot (small craft) 2, Science (physics) 4, Science (planetology) 3, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	6	EDU	13	
END	6	SOC	10	

Playing Ankor: The Professor is a Droyne genius. Grandfather permitted her to continue her work, despite the danger she poses to his little bottle society, because she reminded him of himself in his younger days. Another scientist might have been removed by one of his agents (see *The Agent of Grandfather*, on page 174)

- Speak quickly but precisely.
- Take notes of everything the Travellers say.
- Rub your hands together in excitement.

CHURCH OF GRANDFATHER

The Yaskoti civilisation exists at Grandfather's whim. They know they are literally a chosen people, that their God really did reach down and create them to serve his divine plan. The Church of Yaskoydray is the single most powerful force in Yaskoti society.

Most Droyne worship Grandfather in a distant way and do not believe he or his agents actually intercede directly. The senior members of the Church know the truth – Grandfather is not a metaphor or a myth but a real entity. Grandfather himself never visits the Yaskoti but his cybernetically-enhanced or robotic agents do visit the Church on occasion.

The largest cathedral in Ushen is located in the heart of the city. It is a huge edifice of glass and concrete; at the apex is a statue of Grandfather looking down protectively at his creation.

The leader of the Church is a Leader-caste Droyne named Atos, whose official title is the Coyn-Keeper. Atos pretends to be a religious fanatic to keep the Church's faithful enthused and loyal; in truth, he regards the Church as nothing but a useful instrument of social control for carrying out Grandfather's wishes. He is not one of Grandfather's augmented agents but his human aide Caol is an augmented creation of Yaskoydray. When the Travellers arrive in Ushen, Caol is off on 'a secret mission', leaving Atos to deal with the Travellers himself. Caol returns during *The Agent of Grandfather* (see page 174).

If the Travellers secretly infiltrate the Church, they learn about its beliefs – Grandfather created this world for the Yaskoti and it is a sin to leave its confines without permission. Only Grandfather and his emissaries may travel 'beyond the sky'. The Travellers' questions draw the attention of the Bureau of Security.

If the Travellers contact the Church authorities, then they are brought before Atos, who interrogates them to see if they are emissaries from Grandfather or merely delusional. If they tell him about an attack on Grandfather, he assumes they are delusional and has them imprisoned by the Bureau of Security.

If the Travellers present themselves as offworlders to the Church's faithful and demonstrate their high technology, they are assumed to be emissaries of Grandfather. Huge crowds gather to praise the Travellers and ask for their blessings. They are treated as living gods; with his grip on the Church threatened, Atos humbly asks to meet with the Travellers so they can discuss the will of Yaskoydray. Once the Droyne priest has private access to the Travellers, he questions them about their dealings with Grandfather and may hand them over to the Bureau of Security if he believes they are a danger to the Yaskoti.

Atos and the Space Programme: The priest is aware of the existence of an illegal space programme and believes it to be located somewhere west of Ushen. If the Science (psychology) 4, claim to be emissaries from Grandfather, he asks them if they condone the programme, assuming that they must know more about it than he does.

ATOS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Male	58

TRAITS				—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	10		Admin 3, Advocate 2, Diplomat 4, Leadership 2, Persuade 3, Science (history) 4, Science (psychology) 4, Steward 3
DEX	7	EDU	12		
END	6	SOC	13		

Playing Atos: Atos understands that the survival of his powerful position in Yaskoti society and, indeed, the survival of society in general is entirely dependent on pleasing Grandfather. Without his adviser Caol, he has to guess what Grandfather wants. Play him as using bluster to cover up a lack of understanding.

- Demand that the Travellers respect your authority and social position. Shout them down if they argue with you.
- Call your staff via intercom every few minutes and demand they find Caol as soon as possible.
- Hold your head high, puff out your chest, toy with a handful of coins.

BUREAU OF SECURITY

This shadowy government department is dedicated to preserving the status quo in Yaskoti society. Deviants are purged or exiled, disruptive technologies sabotaged or removed, and political dissent stifled. The Bureau has spies everywhere. For many years, the Bureau's chief purpose was to keep the humans in their 'proper' place; recently, its remit has expanded to include Droyne deemed a threat to society.

While the Bureau has connections to the Church of Grandfather, it is a secular organisation. The Church's goals and those of the Bureau do not always align; the Bureau is not wholly opposed to new technologies and beliefs, so long as their introduction is carefully managed so as not to disrupt Yaskoti culture.

The Bureau's centre of operations in Ushen is an underground facility beneath the city centre. From here, Bureau agents monitor communications, spy on seditious gatherings and dispatch agents to deal with 'problems'.

ADMINISTRATOR UATE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	Male	52

TRAITS				—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	12		Admin 4, Advocate 3, Diplomat 4, Electronics (computers) 3, Investigate 4, Streetwise 3
DEX	6	EDU	10		
END	7	SOC	10		
EQUIPMENT					**Weapons:** Body Pistol (3D-3)

Playing Administrator Uate: The bloodless administrator is the guardian of state security in the Yaskoti. He has no time for wild tales about aliens and dimensional pockets – he just wants to keep the humans in line and ensure the safety of the general population. He is utterly emotionless and inscrutable. He smokes the Droyne equivalent of cigarettes, a sort of pocket-sized hookah that hangs from the wing.

- Do not draw out the interrogation of the Travellers; they will be arrested and questioned again in the next section of the adventure, so avoid making the game repetitive. If you do end up interviewing them as Uate, either cut the interview short or have *Nightmare Breach* show up during the interview.
- Speak in a bored monotone. Never raise your voice.
- Show through your body language that you loathe any human Travellers.
- Ignore the Travellers when they talk about Grandfather or alien races. Show interest only in Professor Ankor's criminal activities and the Travellers' actions among the Yaskoti.

Under the Watchful Eyes: Unless the Travellers manage to conceal their presence in Ushen, they will be identified and shadowed by the Bureau of Security. Teams of black-suited Droyne stalk them wherever they go; their communications are tapped (if possible) and anyone they talk to is subsequently detained and interviewed by the Bureau. Staying ahead of the Bureau requires a Very Difficult (+12) Streetwise or Deception check (DEX or INT), possibly modified if the Travellers were careful to conceal their activities in Ushen.

Arrested: If the Travellers give themselves away, the Bureau moves in to arrest them. Initially, this arrest comes in the shape of a group of Bureau agents (two per Traveller, although if they are separated, the Bureau will pick them off individually). If the Travellers resist and fight back, throw more Bureau agents at them; if the Travellers start blasting away with high-tech weapons and demonstrating why it is a really bad idea to attack someone from a civilisation that's five or more Tech Levels above your own, then the Bureau sends in the marines, in the form of heavily armed soldiers and gunships.

If the Travellers keep fighting, then skip onto *Nightmare Breach*. If they are arrested, they are imprisoned in the Bureau's dungeon and will be dragged back out and questioned by the head of the Bureau, Administrator Uate, as soon as *Nightmare Breach* begins.

Bureau Files: The Travellers may choose to investigate or break into the Bureau to learn about the illegal space programme. The Bureau is monitoring suspicious activity in the western mountains; there are long-range photographs of a structure that the Travellers recognise as a launch gantry and large hangar.

NIGHTMARE BREACH

The Travellers were not the only ones to come through the teleporter from Grandfather's space station. Servants (or shards, depending on your perspective) of Seven followed them to the world of the Yaskoti. Their mission is to search the planet for Grandfather's Family Archive, his method of cheating death through resurrection. The Travellers have been designated secondary targets.

With only a limited teleport ability, Seven's invasion force consists of three 'easily portable' elements.

Neural Highjack Plague: A combination of organic and cybernetic virus, this weapon infects the Droyne and subverts their minds. The virus strips the host's body for iron and other metals to assemble tiny radio transmitters within the brain. A side effect of this process is that the host is reduced to a near-vegetative state, effectively killing them. The virus takes control of the host's body, boosting the Droyne equivalent of adrenaline and triggering the hormone response normally associated with the Soldier caste. It spreads by touch – or, more often, bite or claw.

In short, it is a Droyne zombie virus that turns its victims into mutated monsters. The microscopic radio transmitters allow the drones to communicate wirelessly with each other, turning each pack of zombies into a local network. Anything one zombie sees, they all see. The primary purpose of the zombie plague is to turn the population of the world into an information gathering device for Seven's agents. Once infected, the zombies try to spread the plague; once their population hits a critical threshold, they will disperse over the surface of the planet and look for Grandfather's Family Archive.

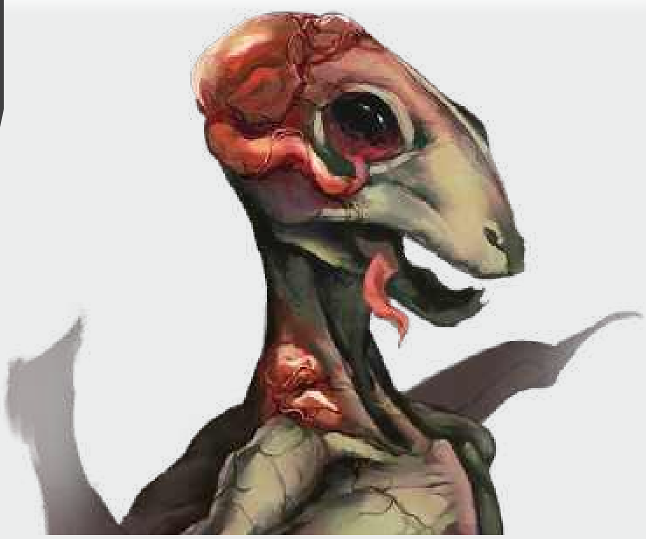
Those infected by the virus show clear signs of illness; the subverted Droyne suffer from a fever, with blackened eyes. As the plague progresses, the victim grows larger and stronger, just like a Soldier-caste Droyne, but the added muscle and bone mass is unevenly distributed and cancerous.

Note that while these creatures are effectively zombies, they are not undead or supernatural – they are hijacked Droyne, compelled to obey the virus. They have no special resistance to damage. They are not brain-eating monsters and not especially carnivorous.

DROYNE ZOMBIE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	1	Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1
DEX	4	EDU	0	
END	10	SOC	0	
EQUIPMENT			**Weapons:** Claw (1D)	



ASSASSIN DRONES

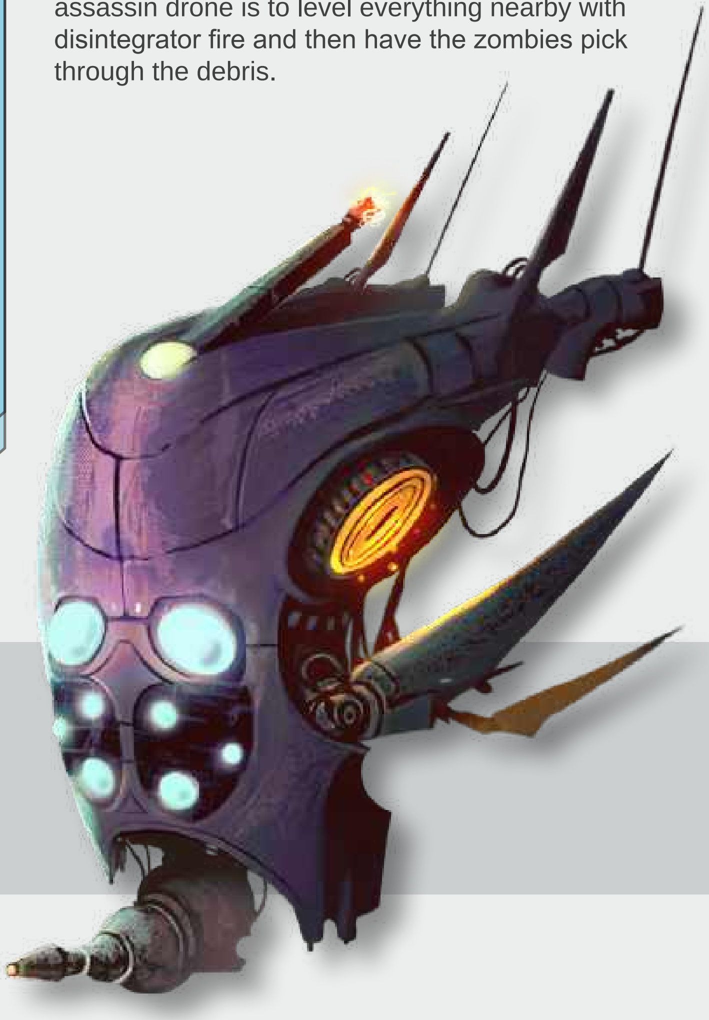
These are second-line war machines, designed to deal with 'problems' that might impede the spread of the zombies. They are small flying drones, each about the size of a human but equipped with disintegrators. A single one of these absurdly powerful drones could wipe out most of the Yaskoti military on its own. If the zombies spot the Travellers, then an assassin drone is dispatched to eliminate them, arriving within 2D minutes. The standard offensive protocol for an assassin drone is to level everything nearby with disintegrator fire and then have the zombies pick through the debris.

DROYNE TRAVELLERS

If your group includes any Droyne Travellers, they are vulnerable to infection. Droyne Travellers who are bitten must make a Difficult (10+) END check to avoid infection; a successful Difficult (10+) Medic check made within 60 seconds of the bite allows the victim to make a second Average (8+) END check to avoid infection. An infected Traveller is doomed (unless the infected Traveller is also Grandfather's host, in which case they are mysteriously immune). The virus usually takes only a few minutes to subvert the host's brain but the onset time can be delayed with medication.

OTHER DROYNE

Similarly, if the Travellers are accompanied by a Droyne character such as Professor Ankor, then their companion may fall prey to the virus.



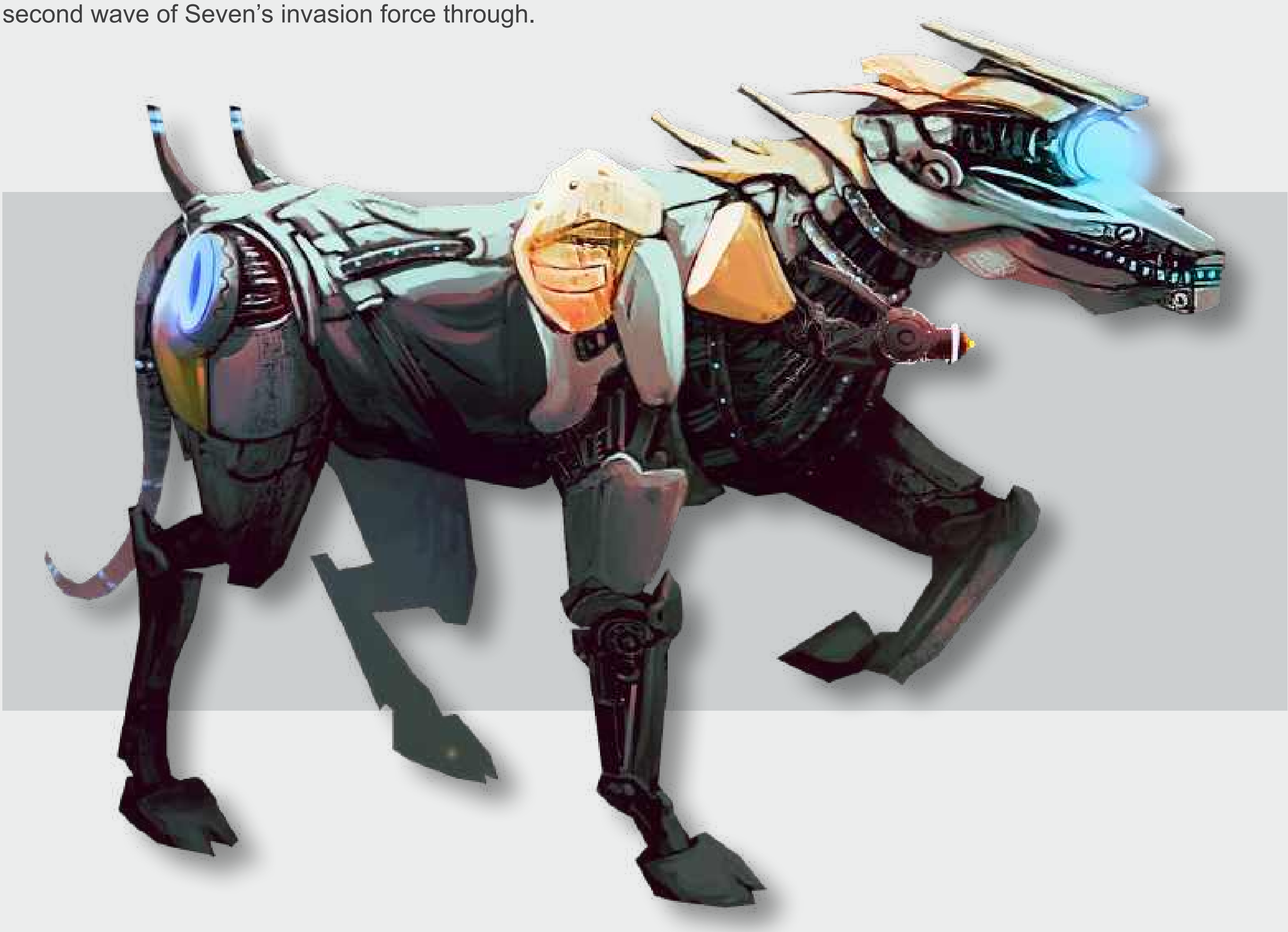
Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Assassin Drone	22	Grav	– m	25+	Priceless

Skills	Electronics (sensors) 3, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Recon 3
Attacks	Disintegrator (1DD)
Manipulators	None
Endurance	Unlimited
Traits	Armour (+15), Flyer (supersonic), Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision
Programming	Advanced (INT 9)
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Drone Interface, Fire Control System (enhanced), PRIS Sensor, Recon Sensor (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Weapon Mount (medium), Wireless Data Link

ASSEMBLERS

Assemblers are large robots, barely small enough to fit through the teleportation portal. They resemble skinned horses made out of metal. As soon as they emerge, they start harvesting resources from the surrounding area and constructing another, larger teleportation device in situ.

This second, bigger teleporter is designed to allow the second wave of Seven's invasion force through.

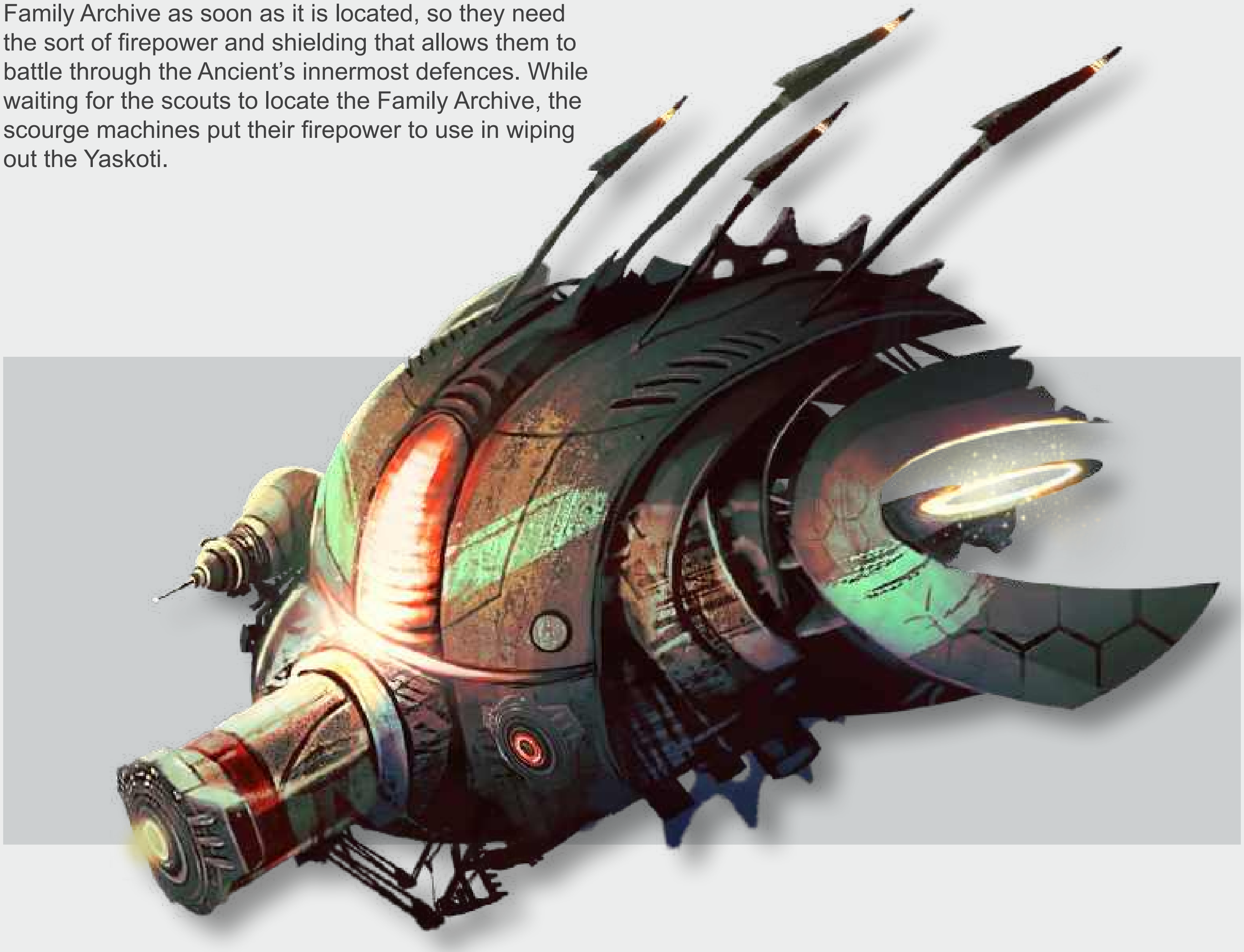


Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Assembler Robot	112	Walker	9m	25+	Priceless

Skills	Athletics (strength) 4, Engineer (all) 4, Mechanic 4, Profession (construction) 6
Attacks	Construction Tool (4D)
Manipulators	2 X (STR 18 DEX 10)
Endurance	Unlimited
Traits	Armour (+20), ATV, Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Large (+4)
Programming	Very Advanced (INT 12)
Options	Auditory Sensor, Construction Equipment (large), Drone Interface, Fabrication Chamber (32 slots advanced), Mechanical Toolkit (advanced), Mining Equipment (large), Robotic Drone Controller (advanced), PRIS Sensor, Starship Engineer Toolkit (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum Environment Protection, Voder Speaker, Wireless Data Link

SCOURGE MACHINES

These are much bigger, much nastier versions of the drones. Each scourge machine is the size of a large aircraft and has the sort of firepower more commonly associated with capital ships, including relativity weapons and antimatter cannons. The purpose of the scourge machines is to annihilate Grandfather's Family Archive as soon as it is located, so they need the sort of firepower and shielding that allows them to battle through the Ancient's innermost defences. While waiting for the scouts to locate the Family Archive, the scourge machines put their firepower to use in wiping out the Yaskoti.



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Scourge Machine	180	Grav	– m	25+	Priceless

Skills	Electronics (sensors) 3, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Recon 3
Attacks	Antimatter Cannon (3DD), Disintegrator (1DD)
Manipulators	None
Endurance	Unlimited
Traits	Armour (+30), Flyer (slow), Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Large (+5)
Programming	Advanced (INT 9)
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Drone Interface, Fire Control System (enhanced), PRIS Sensor, Recon Sensor (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Vacuum

THE MISSING ARCHIVE

Killing Yaskoydray may be satisfying (if 'satisfaction' is an emotion that can be ascribed to a quarter-million year old living warship) but it is an empty gesture unless Seven can also annihilate Grandfather's Family Archive. All of the Ancients had facilities in place to enable them to cheat death in one form or another, a way of resurrecting themselves. Grandfather, for example, favours cloned bodies. If his current form is mortally wounded, he psionically jumps his consciousness to another clone body.

It is an unwritten law that each of the Ancients has only a single 'active' version of themselves at any time. All the Sons were made from Grandfather and they share in his ego. Each believes themselves to be the supreme intellect in the cosmos and the last rival they could tolerate is another version of themselves.

During the Final Wars, the Family Archives were the primary target for all warring Ancients. This is why the Final Wars were so destructive – often, the only way to be sure of eliminating a rival was to utterly destroy every planet where they might have concealed an Archive. Seven intends to tear Grandfather's pocket universe apart until he finds the Family Archive.

What Seven does not know, and could never guess, is that Grandfather has already moved his Archive out of the pocket universe...

INVASION TIMELINE

The attack by Seven's forces do not happen according to a set timeline; instead, it is left open to the Referee as to what transpires. The most likely scenario is that the first zombies start showing up when the Travellers are exploring Ushen but do not attack directly. Instead, they spot some dark-eyed Droyne acting strangely but the Travellers assume it is just another harmless example of local weirdness, not the precursor to a zombie plague. Start with the attack proper at a suitably dramatic moment.

The events leading up to the invasion take place in roughly the following order:

- The Travellers arrive through the teleportation portal.
- A short time later, a half-dozen assassin drones arrive through the portal. One drone locates the nearest population centre (the village closest to Lan's farmstead) and travels there. The other five fly high into the atmosphere and locate the largest cities. They then drop capsules containing the zombie plague. The infection begins.
- The assembler robots come through the portal.
- The zombie plague spreads. The Bureau of Security becomes aware something is wrong.
- The first attack by an assassin drone occurs when Bureau of Security forces attack zombies on the outskirts of Ushen.
- The assemblers begin work on the new portal.
- The zombie plague becomes an epidemic.
- More attacks by assassin drones occur.
- The zombie population reaches a critical threshold, causing the zombies to disperse over the surface of the planet, looking for the Family Archive. If the Travellers were about to be overcome by a zombie horde, this gives them a temporary respite but it does mean that wherever they go, they will encounter zombies.
- The assemblers complete the teleportation portal.
- Scourge machines and more assassin drones begin to arrive.
- Scourge machines attack the Yaskoti.
- Yaskoti resistance crumbles; the scourge machines kill millions every hour.
- The Yaskoti are wiped out.

Seven predicts the entire invasion should take less than a week.

RUMOURS OF A THREAT

Depending on where the Travellers are, they hear rumours of strange events. If they are 'guests' of the Bureau, they may be brought before Administrator Utae and asked to explain the video images of zombie Droyne and drone attacks. If they are on the streets or in the university, they see television news reports that start with rumours about a mystery illness and as the invasion continues expand to report on strange sightings, explosions and a curfew put in place by the Bureau of Security.

The Travellers may be followed by zombies at this point but they will not be attacked unless they provoke the creatures.

Possible encounters during this stage of the invasion include:

- **Public Curfew:** The Travellers are prevented from reaching their destination by a barricade erected by the Bureau of Security forces. All the Droyne in the area are told to return to their homes. If questioned, the Bureau forces insist that 'human dissidents' are causing violence on the streets and a curfew has been imposed for reasons of public safety.
- **Sick Droyne:** The Travellers encounter a young Droyne who is obviously very ill; he is feverish, weak and increasingly delirious. He has been infected by Seven's plague. A successful Difficult (10+) Medic check confirms that the Droyne is affected by some sort of virus; analysing the Droyne's blood or brain tissue in a properly-equipped laboratory (say, at the university) shows the presence of something bizarre and obviously artificial in the victim's body.
- **Fortean Events:** A crowd has gathered around some strange objects that fell from the sky, small spheres of an unknown material. The spheres caused minimal property damage or injuries. Some Droyne suggest they are blessings from Grandfather; others may mutter about the secret and heretical space programme. In fact, these are the capsules dropped by the assassin drones to spread the plague; soon, all Droyne in the crowd start showing symptoms of the virus.
- **Lights in the Sky:** The Travellers spot a pattern of five lights moving in the sky, impossibly fast. No TL7 flying machine could move with such speed and agility – whatever is up there has to be using grav plates or some other high-tech drive. The Travellers have in fact spotted the assassin drones as they catch the rays of Yaskot's primary star.
- **Wild Rumours:** The Travellers overhear a bizarre rumour about mass hysteria and rioting in outlying settlements. Such behaviour is unthinkable for the orderly, cohesive Droyne race. The only Droyne who commonly defy the status quo are the rare Sport-caste and there are unlikely to be enough Sports in a community to band together to create the disturbances described by the rumours.
- **Military Build-Up:** The Travellers see a flotilla of airships pass overhead, escorted by a huge flock of Droyne soldiers. They are heading towards the outskirts of the city.

THE AGENT OF GRANDFATHER

Caol is an agent of Grandfather, just like Vlen Backett is an agent of Seven. He appears to be a dark-skinned human male of Vilani descent in his mid-thirties, with a blandly pleasant face, a muscular build and distinctive yellowish eyes. In fact, he is old enough to remember the birth of the First Imperium and his body is crammed with cybernetic augmentation and Ancients technology. If the Travellers chose to go with Grandfather at the end

CAOL

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	Unknown

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	15	INT	12	Admin 2, Advocate 2, Astrogation 3, Broker 2, Carouse 2, Deception 6, Diplomat 2, Electronics (comms) 5, Electronics (computers) 5, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (j-drive) 3, Flyer 0, Gambler 2, Gunner (turret) 3, Investigate 3, Jack-of-all-Trades 3, Mechanic 3, Medic 2, Melee (unarmed) 2, Persuade 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 3, Recon 2, Science (all) 3, Stealth 5, Steward 3, Streetwise 4, Survival 3, Vacc Suit 3
DEX	15	EDU	14	
END	15	SOC	9	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Fusion Pistol (8D+8) **Armour:** Subdermal Armour (+3)

Playing Caol: You are the ultimate secret agent. Grandfather's death may be the most shocking revelation imaginable to you but it still will not faze you. The mission must be completed.

- Adopt a comfortable posture and stick to it. Try and fail to act human.
- You are the pinnacle of humanity. You are a cybernetic demigod with powerful psionic abilities and 1,000 lifetimes of experience. Exude confidence.
- Never show surprise or uncertainty. At most, defer a problem or question to be dealt with later.
- Swivel your head every so often, as if you can hear a noise that the Travellers cannot detect.

of the recorded memories in the last adventure, then Caol may actually know the real-world versions of Emyakoy, Urd and the other Precursors.

For the last 30 years, Caol has been advisor to the head of the Church of Grandfather. This is a simple assignment, the Ancients equivalent of babysitting. A month ago, he decided to amuse himself by taking a fishing holiday. After all, what could happen in a few weeks?

Then Grandfather died. Caol does not know about Seven's attack on the pocket universe, or the failure of Yaskoydray's superweapon, but he knows something terrible has happened. Using skills honed over millennia in service to the Ancients, he tracked the Travellers down.

Caol contacts the Travellers, no matter where they are – he has the authority to go anywhere in the Church or city, and can break into the Bureau's most secure prison with ease. If the Travellers are lost or imprisoned, he can find them and get them back on the path of the adventure.

Once he finds the Travellers, he introduces himself (Vlen's Inheritor instantly notices that Caol reminds them of their late uncle) and demands that the Travellers tell him what happened.

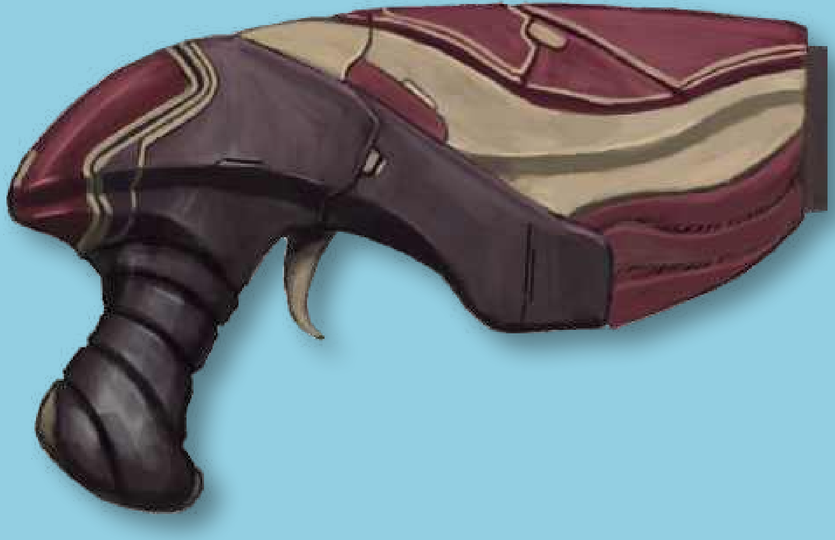
Caol's Sacrifice: Caol is much, much smarter than the Travellers. He works out (through subtle psionic probes if nothing else) that Grandfather's consciousness is hidden in one of them. Protecting that Traveller becomes Caol's primary mission. Caol leads the Travellers out of their current predicament, if any, to a safe area of the city. He then detects an incoming assassin drone. He evaluates the situation, then speaks quickly:

'I must engage the enemy to cover your retreat. Here is a weapon. Use it sparingly, it will draw their attention. Find a way to escape this planet. If you can make it there, there is a supply cache in the village of Galor, under the church. Good luck.'

He hands the weapon to a Traveller *other* than Grandfather's host, then removes his jacket and peels off a section of his skin, revealing a small compartment in his chest. He removes another weapon and sprints off, inhumanly quickly. A few moments later, the Travellers see him fire at a fast-moving dot in the sky – an assassin drone. The drone's counterattack destroys the buildings around Caol and the Travellers lose sight of him. He has bought them time to escape.

CAOL'S WEAPON

Caol is armed with a TL22 Fusion Pistol



WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	POWER PACK COST	TRAITS
Fusion Pistol	22	30m	8D+8	0.5	—	16	—	AP 20, Zero-G

THE FALL OF THE YASKOTI

By this point in the adventure, the Travellers should know that the only way into orbit is via the rumoured secret space programme in the western mountains. If they have not worked this out, then they can either find references to the space programme in the ruins of the University/Bureau of Security or be told where to go by Caol before he dies.

Unfortunately, between them and their goal is the end of the world.

BATTLEFIELD USHEN

The city is overrun. Millions of Droyne have become networked zombies, the eyes and ears of the invasion force; whenever the zombies run into resistance or spot something interesting, assassin drones arrive to support them.

Keep throwing dangers and threats at the Travellers. They have little chance of taking down an assassin drone unless they use Caol's weapon, so most encounters with assassin drones revolve around the Travellers finding ways to evade the hostile machines. Herd the Travellers towards the human tunnels under the city if they do not think of taking refuge there themselves. Consider using the following enocunters:

- **Lone Zombie:** The Travellers run into a single Droyne zombie. The creature is trapped inside a small space (locked room, corridor, groundcar or tunnel) and is executing a futile search pattern to find an exit. It moves in circles, looking for fresh victims or something interesting to look at. The zombie will not attack the Travellers (unless there are Droyne in the group) but instead watches them and transmits a message back to the rest of the zombies. Unless the Travellers deal with the lone zombie immediately, it summons a larger pack of the creatures to the area.
- **Zombie Pack:** The Travellers encounter a large mob (4D+4) of Droyne zombies. This can take place almost anywhere in the city, in any area where crowds might gather (shopping arcades, main streets or public venues). If the zombies get close enough to recognise the Travellers, they attempt to capture and restrain them. The Travellers need to either blast their way through the zombie pack or else find a way to escape.
- **Desperate Survivors:** The Travellers encounter a band of 1D+1 Droyne survivors, who are still uninfected. The Droyne beg for help; they suggest finding a vehicle and fleeing the city. See *Escaping the City*, on page 177.
- **Flying Zombies:** Droyne can fly; so can the plague-controlled zombies. This encounter takes place in any open area (main street, parkland or atop a building). Zombies circle overhead in a distinctive search pattern, like a swarm of drones. The Travellers need to dart from cover-to-cover to avoid being seen.
- **Drone Hunter:** The Travellers see a single assassin drone flying overhead. The drone does not detect them – but if they run into any zombies while the drone is nearby, it doubles back to attack, demonstrating to the Travellers that the zombies are connected to the drone weapons.
- **Rally The Troops:** The bulk of the Yaskoti military gets wiped out within hours of engaging Seven's forces. The Droyne officers are overcome by the virus but the humans who make up the bulk of the infantry are immune. They suffer casualties from zombie attacks, and are incinerated in the hundreds by drones, but still are much more likely to survive than the Droyne. The Travellers encounter a band of a dozen human soldiers who have lost their Droyne leaders. The humans need leadership or will turn to looting and violence against the Droyne. The human spokesman is a veteran soldier named Arod; he believes this plague is Grandfather's judgement and that the end of the world is at hand. If the Travellers can convince Arod to rally his troops and cover their retreat, they can avoid the *Zombie Searchers* encounter.

TAKE TO THE SKY

Instead of heading into the underground tunnels and leaving the city by groundcar, the Travellers may attempt to steal a faster flying machine and escape the city by air. There are two sorts of flying machine in common use in Ushen – large, slow hydrogen airships and small helicopters. Trying to escape the city in an airship is suicide, as the blimps are easy prey for assassin drones. The Travellers might be able to take a helicarrier, although the only ones available are in the military bases on the outskirts of the city or in the Bureau of Security.

- **Zombie Searchers:** A huge swarm of zombies approaches the Travellers. The zombies are dispersing, moving away from each other. The Travellers need to find a place to hide where the zombies cannot follow.
- **Drone Assault:** A squadron of assassin drones flies low over the city, firing indiscriminately at buildings, humans and uninfected Droyne. The drones have determined that Grandfather's Family Archive is not in Ushen but it might be *beneath* it. Therefore, the drones begin to wipe out the city, to clear the surface for the scourge machines following behind.
- **Into the Human Tunnels:** With the drones blasting anything on the surface, the safest place to take refuge is in the tunnel network under the city.

THE TUNNELS

The tunnels are a warren of concrete-lined tunnels, linked to huge vertical shafts lined with apartments. Some of the main tunnels are lined with shops and facilities for the human population. Light is provided by electric lanterns in the ceiling and there are fast subway trains in the larger tunnels; these trains are used for transporting both people and cargo, and link to the vehicle hangars at the edge of the city.

The human population is immune to the bizarre plague and the tunnels rapidly fill with both humans and Droyne fleeing the chaos of the surface. The entrances to several of the tunnels have been blocked with crude barricades but if the Travellers search, they can find an alternative way down or clamber over or blast through a barrier.

There are few surviving zombies in the tunnels; those who make it down here are beaten to death by humans defending their homes. However, as soon as the assassin drone and scourge machine attacks start in earnest, the main danger the Travellers face is the tunnels collapsing on top of them.

Navigating the tunnel network without a guide is difficult and time-consuming; call for Difficult (10+) Navigate checks (INT) to find a way through. If this check fails, roll on the Tunnel Hazards table. Alternatively, the Travellers can recruit a human guide with an Average (8+) Diplomat or Streetwise check (INT).

ESCAPING THE CITY

Once the Travellers have made their way through the human tunnels, they arrive in a large vehicle hangar. There are several different types of vehicle here, ranging from small groundcars and minibuses to larger cargo haulers and earthmovers. All vehicles are powered by internal combustion engines with the exception of the larger haulers, which use fissile batteries.

If the Travellers are travelling alone, they can all fit into one or two fast groundcars; if, as is possible, they have picked up an entourage of survivors, they can either take a minibus or form a convoy of vehicles. The roads out of the city are clogged with the blasted remains of other vehicles – the assassin drones passed over this area earlier, blasting anything that moved. However, the drones are now levelling the city and so the Travellers have a window of escape.

Tunnel Hazards

1D	Hazard
1	**Zombies:** The Travellers run into another pack of 1D+2 zombies. Unless they put these unfortunate creatures down swiftly (within 2D rounds), their location is transmitted to an assassin drone, who blasts the tunnel from above causing a Major Collapse (see below).
2	**Human Looters:** A gang of 1D+1 human survivors are moving through the tunnels, looting anything they can salvage. The Travellers can either bluff or intimidate their way past, or else fight the looters.
3	**Gas Leak:** This tunnel is filling with toxic gas from a broken pipe. If the Travellers do not have protective equipment, they suffer 1D damage. Any weapons fire risks causing an explosion (4D damage to anyone in the tunnel).
4	**Minor Collapse:** Pick a random Traveller; the roof above them creaks, then gives way. The Traveller may make a Difficult (10+) DEX check to dodge away; if they fail, they suffer 2D damage.
5	**Road Hog:** A panicked human drives a groundcar down the narrow tunnel. The Travellers are right in his path. They can dodge or else try to take control of the vehicle for themselves.
6	**Major Collapse:** The whole tunnel segment begins to collapse. The Travellers need to either find a way to prevent the collapse or else run to the next section of tunnel. This is an Average (8+) DEX check; those who fail suffer 1D damage for each point of negative Effect.

APOCALYPSE ZONE

Looking back at the city, the Travellers can see the scourge machines moving in. These horrors are the size of passenger aircraft; as they move soundlessly through the sky, their beam weapons sear the landscape. Their blasts vaporise billions of tons of rock in seconds, carving a deep crater where the city once stood. They stalk through the seething black clouds, searching for some clue to Grandfather's Archive. In their wake, no life survives. The city of Ushen is utterly destroyed.

The same fate awaits every other part of this doomed world.

CAOL'S SUPPLY CACHE

The Travellers may take a short detour to the small village of Galor, some 50 kilometres north of Ushen, to retrieve the supply cache mentioned by Caol. The village is empty – all the inhabitants were Droyne and their plague-infested bodies are currently radiating out from the village in a spiral search pattern, transmitting topological data back to the scourge machines as they search for the Family Archive.

The supply cache is located beneath the small village church. It reminds the Galor, some 50 kilometres north of Ushen, to retrieve the supply cache mentioned by Caol of Uncle Vlen's hunting lodge on Alell (see page 52, in Homecoming); the cellar room is crowded with keepsakes and curiosities from dozens of cultures. There is a framed letter of commendation from a Vilani noble of the First Imperium, the robes of a Zhodani Consul, a set of holographs showing Caol with bureaucrats and adventurers from the Second Imperium, strange alien relics, an Aslan dewclaw in a case and piles of other items; old books, different sets of clothes, spare parts and high-tech gadgets. Useful items include:
- Another TL22 Fusion Pistol, similar to the weapon he gave the Travellers earlier
- A TL15 Grav Belt
- A densitometer
- A small and highly portable thermonuclear weapon

DRIVING HARD

The Travellers drive or fly out of Ushen and (presumably) travel west, towards Ankor's secret launch facility. Across the landscape, they see fires and devastation as the scourge machines continue their search. The Travellers encounter the occasional Droyne zombie but these unfortunate creatures are now dying off – a side effect of the plague's reconfiguration of the victim's brain tissue is that it causes lesions and death within 72 hours of infection.

The western mountains are 10 hour's drive away from Ushen under normal circumstances; the journey actually takes the Travellers 16 hours, as they have to backtrack around dangerous zones and find alternate routes. As night falls, they see a fierce glow on the horizon. The burning continues through the night; the air grows hot and acrid. As the Travellers get closer, they can see a swarm of scourge machines digging a vast trench across the landscape.

THE GREAT CRATER

The scourge machines have found something – not the Family Archive they seek but an Ancients structure buried deep beneath the surface. This is an old experiment of Grandfather's, abandoned for thousands of years. It is a terraforming machine, used to alter the atmosphere and gravity of the planet. The scourge machines have blasted their way down to the structure, creating a two-kilometre wide trench right across the Travellers' path.

Through the smoke and the burning rock, the Travellers can spot some sort of alien structure at the bottom of the trench but it is utterly inaccessible – the temperature at the bottom is in excess of 2,300ºK.

Checking maps, the Travellers discover there is no easy way to drive around the trench; one end runs into a bay and the other goes into a spur of the western mountains and is virtually impassable. The Travellers need to find a way of flying over the trench. They may be able to come up with a solution; if they look for resources, they find an abandoned Yaskoti military base nearby.

THE DAMAGED AIRSHIP

The military base is a small one, used for refuelling and refitting the army's aerial artillery pieces. The plague wiped out the staff here, leaving the place undefended. A brief search of the military base finds a single semi-functional airship anchored in a hangar. The airship's control surfaces are damaged but can be repaired with an Average (8+) Mechanic check (1D hours, EDU).

Alternatively, the Travellers can find some other way to control the airship (perhaps by using the grav belt from Caol's cache).

Once the airship is airborne again, the Travellers can proceed across the trench to the mountains. The thick smoke provides cover from the scourge machines and assassin drones for most of the journey...

HUNTERS

… but as the Travellers approach the mountains, they spot an assassin drone approaching them. The drone locks weapons on the airship, and it is clear that it is about to make a close inspection pass of the airship and perhaps attack. The airship has no chance of defeating a TL25+ drone on its own, but the Travellers may have Caol's guns, or be able to distract it.

If the Travellers are unable to take the drone down before it completes its inspection pass, then the drone spins around and fires a single shot through the airship, destroying it. The airship burns and crashes; unless the Travellers can bail out and parachute down to the surface, they are killed.

THE MOUNTAINS OF GRANDFATHER'S WINGS

The western mountains are known as the Mountains of Grandfather's Wings; the Yaskoti believe they symbolise the protective aspect of their distant god. The mountains are towering pinnacles of granite, with few inhabitants. The nearest town – back when there was a nearest town, as opposed to a glassy crater – is several hours away. This is the middle of nowhere.

Building a secret launch facility here took years of effort. Professor Ankor could not have succeeded without sympathisers within the Bureau of Security, but there are – or, more accurately, were – many Yaskoti who chafed under the restrictive tenets of the Church, and wanted to see their species make the leap into space. The launch facility was disguised as a mine, and rocket parts and suppliers were shipped out disguised as 'mining equipment.'

THE SECRET BASE

The base's isolation has been its salvation. The plague has not reached the base yet, and the 300 Droyne present are uninfected. The leader of the base is Professor Ankor's assistant, a young Droyne Technician named Koksayar. He has been monitoring radio traffic from Ushen, and is aware that an apocalypse has befallen the entire Yaskoti civilisation. To rally morale, he has had the Droyne staff prepare the rocket for launch. He knows this is a futile gesture, as the rocket has only enough range to reach orbit, but the gesture kept his crew sane while their world ended.

If the Travellers have Professor Ankor with them, she can explain the existence of the Ancients portal in orbit. Otherwise, they need to make the case to Koksayar themselves.

Playing Koksayar: The Technician is on the edge of a breakdown. He was pushing himself to the limit just to get the rocket ready for launch before the Bureau of Security found them; now, his entire world has been invaded and destroyed. He has not slept in days and it is a miracle he is still even slightly sane. The rocket has become his obsession and his salvation. All he wants is to get into orbit.
- You are exhausted; show this by slumping, yawning or losing the thread of the conversation.
- If the Travellers reveal they are offworlders, question them about space travel. Beg them to help you with the rocket launch.
- Never say die, even in the face of Armageddon.

LAST GOODBYE

If the Travellers check the base's astronomical observations, they find that there is an object in orbit that matches the size and configuration of the portal back to the original universe (if the Travellers do not think to check, then Koksayar can point this out). The Droyne refer to it as *Traissthurdusa,* 'little lonely Sport with a bright eye'. A Routine (6+) Astrogation or Pilot check (INT) lets the Travellers work out that *Traissthurdusa* will be within reach of the rocket if they leave soon. The launch window is only another three hours.

The Droyne rocket is roughly equivalent to an Atlas-class rocket and can carry a payload of 20 tons to orbit. The Droyne offer the Travellers spaces on the rocket (Grandfather psionically manipulates the Droyne to ensure his chosen agents escape). The rocket can hold a crew of up to 10 if the scientific payload and other supplies are discarded; it is up to the Travellers who they wish to rescue from this dying world. If the Travellers have no preferences, then Koksayar has his technicians and staff draw lots to determine who gets to go.

The rocket consists of four booster stages; the crew capsule has limited thruster capability but is able to change orbit to reach the portal.

YASKONAUTS AWAY!

With all preparations made, the Travellers strap into the rocket. This is space travel at its most primitive – the Travellers are going into orbit by sitting atop a big explosion of burning chemicals. The Droyne handle most of the controls, so all the Travellers need to do is fly the capsule when they reach orbit.

10.
Countdowns are endemic to all Travellers.

9.
Despite the impending destruction of their civilisation, the Yaskoti technicians remain focused and excited. This is their moment, the culmination of years of work.

8.
Tons of pressurised rocket fuel pours into the engines.

7.
An assassin drone detects the hidden base and moves to investigate

6.
The main engine starts.

5.
The Yaskoti crew chitter farewell to their compatriots.

4.
The assassin drone swoops over the launch facility, scanning it. It determines there is no sign of the Family Archive but that this is a target of opportunity. It loops around, charging its weapons systems.

3.
Of course, all this is pointless. There is no Family Archive on this world or anywhere in the pocket universe. It is all a trap for Seven.

2.
Once the Travellers are through the portal, it will shut behind them and never open again. The pocket universe will collapse, destroying Grandfather's wayward Son. All Grandfather needs to do is ensure that Seven stays dead.

And that means taking risks, like transferring his consciousness into a host so he can set in motion a chain of events that will eliminate Seven's Family Archive.

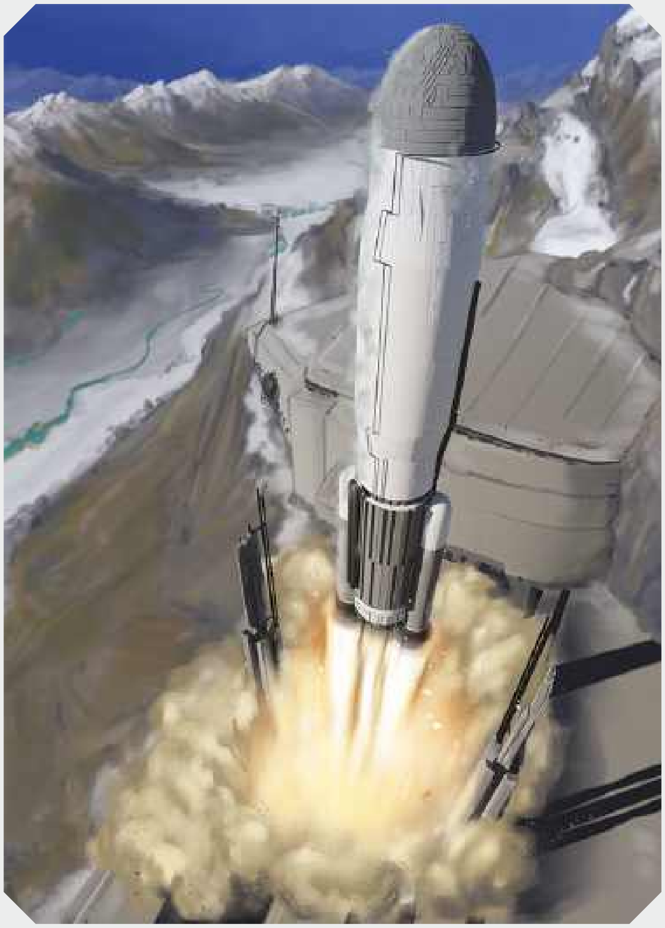
1.
The rocket launches. The drone strafes the launch facility, blasting it to pieces, but the Travellers are already climbing into the sky on a pillar of fire. The acceleration slams the Travellers back in their seats and rattles their bones.

One-by-one, the booster stages drop away, until only the capsule is left, floating serenely in space. The *Traissthurdusa* is 6,000 kilometres distant and approaching quickly.

INTO ORBIT

As Grandfather's servants promised, there is a portal in orbit. It looks identical to the one the Travellers arrived through on board the Ancients ship, back in *Descent*. As the portal approaches the capsule, it responds to their presence. The dull, meteorite-pocked surface of the portal shimmers, then folds in on itself in a way the Travellers cannot quite follow, revealing a glowing silvery gateway. It is a route back to the Spinward Marches.

The capsule approaches the portal but as it does so, it begins to rattle. The magnetic flux from the active portal causes havoc on board the Yaskoti capsule. Consoles spark, lights flicker, instruments go dead. The engines fail and the capsule enters the portal at a slewed angle. A flash of light knocks the Travellers unconscious...



IN THE EMPEROR'S NAME

'This place does not exist. The Imperium rules the space between worlds, not the worlds themselves, and so this station does not belong to any world or noble. You have fallen between the cracks. While you are here, you do not exist.

'And because you do not exist, we can do what we want with you.'
— Interrogator #3, The Gash Imperial Prison Hulk

The Travellers discover they have been captured by Imperial Intelligence and are being held on 'the Gash', an orbital prison hulk above Pixie. There, they are interrogated by Arisa of Imperial Intelligence, who they last encountered back on Alell in *Homecoming*. She demands they reveal what they know about the Ancients vessel that destroyed Gand Holcess and the *Alahir*.

The Travellers need to either escape the prison hulk or convince Arisa to trust them and that the threat to the Imperium is real.

IMPERIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Imperium rules the space between worlds, not the worlds themselves. It is a loose association of 11,000 worlds and while each domain and sector has its own fleets and military apparatuses, there are few institutions that encompass the whole Imperium.

One of these empire-spanning organisations is the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service. The IISS maintains the vital x-boat network linking the furthest fringes of the Imperium to the core worlds, its scouts survey unexplored planets and gather scientific data on Imperial worlds and it deals with client states on the border of Imperial space. The Intelligence branch is one small part of the IISS that correlates and analyses data gathered by thousands of scouts... and one even smaller part of that branch is the IISS' Espionage Division.

Eleven thousand worlds in the Imperium and only a tiny handful of agents to guard them all. The Espionage Division are the secret watchers of the Imperium, on guard against threats that might destabilise the third great empire of Humaniti. The IISS and especially the Espionage Division, see information from across the whole of Charted Space and can dimly discern the movement of greater powers. The invisible war of the Ancients, a war fought through proxies, pawns and secret agents, affects the Imperium in a million subtle ways.

Even within the Espionage Division, few believe in the theories about active Ancients conspiracies. Gand Holcess, who died at Boughene, was convinced that the Ancients continue to exert influence over the present great powers of the galaxy but only a handful of others share this conviction. Other Espionage agents agree there is something else out there but blame the strange events on Zhodani meddling, Hiver manipulation, internal treachery or another unidentified great power... but no-one has ever found solid proof of a conspiracy.

Until now.

Now, they have the Travellers.

ARISA

The description here assumes Arisa encountered the Travellers on Alell but failed to infiltrate the group. If she travelled with them for a time, her attitude to the Travellers may have changed. If she died during the adventure, then replace her with an Imperial agent named Orcio. In the extremely unlikely event that Arisa infiltrated the Travellers and stayed with them through all their strange adventures in Grandfather's pocket universe, then she too was captured by Imperial Intelligence when she emerged through the Boughene portal and is held as a prisoner on board the Gash.

Arisa Thalber comes from a tiny, insignificant agricultural world in the distant Delphi sector. Bored with a life bounded by a planetary horizon, she volunteered for the scouts and was given a battered, balky scout ship and a mandate to probe the pocket kingdoms of the Hinterworlds and Leonidae. Her excellent reports – and the fact she had survived such a perilous mission – brought her to the attention of the Espionage Division. She was recruited as an Imperial agent and was seen as a rising star within the organisation.

Then she fell until the control of Gand Holcess. Thanks to family connections and his own distinguished record of service, Holcess possessed considerable influence within the Scouts but he was obsessed by his theories about the Ancients and seen as an eccentric, even unstable influence within the IISS. Holcess convinced Arisa that his theories about Ancients meddling in Imperial affairs were valid and that the Spinward Marches was the epicentre of Ancients activity.

During her time in the Marches, Arisa came to agree with some of Holcess's beliefs. She is convinced that the 'long-vanished' Ancients are still active in some form but does not believe they are necessarily interested in Humaniti. Rather, she suspects that the Third Imperium exists in the shadow of vast powers who barely notice Humaniti. Both are wrong; neither suspected that the remaining Ancients are fighting a shadow war across Charted Space.

Following the events on Alell, when Holcess and the *Alahir* set off in pursuit of the Travellers on board the *Star Hunter*, Arisa remained on the jungle world to further investigate Vlen Backett's affairs. She remained in touch with Holcess via x-boat communique as the *Alahir* hunted the Travellers across Regina. The last message she received from him stated that they had pinned the *Star Hunter* down in the atmosphere of the Boughene gas giant and she should stand by for further instructions.

Then, silence.

Taking matters into her own hands, Arisa commandeered a scout ship and travelled to Boughene. She searched the gas giant and found only more mysteries. There was debris matching the *Alahir* but she was unable to identify the energy weapon used to destroy the ship. Holcess's last transmission to the Boughene scout base was equally cryptic and strangely distorted as if jammed – but no known technology allows a meson burst transmitter to be jammed. Searching the upper atmosphere of Boughene, Arisa found a severely damaged ship (either the *Star Hunter* or an antique Droyne rocket, depending on how the Travellers escaped the pocket universe). The crew of the ship (the Travellers) were all in temporary comas caused by the rough transit through the portal, so Arisa took them prisoner and brought them to the Gash.

Appearance: She has close-cropped hair and relatively unremarkable features. She can make herself look pretty or striking but her role as a spy means she usually tries to fade into the background. For this interrogation, she wears a black jumpsuit with the logo of the IISS but no other markings.

Personality: Arisa is a chameleon. She has learned to alter her demeanour to fit any situation; initially, she presents herself as a detached, cold inquisitor. Beneath this facade, she wants to know what happened to Holcess. Over the course of the adventure, depending on the actions of the Travellers, she becomes either terrified of the threat posed by active, malicious Ancients or convinced that the Travellers are lunatics who blundered into an Ancients site and are concealing the truth from the Imperium.

- She is a highly competent spy who enjoys the challenging nature of her work. She hates boredom; better to be running from Zhodani border guards and dodging laser blasts than trapped behind a desk in some dull office.
- Never hesitate, always act. Doing something is always better than doing nothing.
- Betray as little emotion as possible in your voice – be cold and professional. However, move around, gesture and pace to burn off nervous energy.

Goals:
- Find out what happened to Gand Holcess and the Alahir.
- Learn what the Travellers know about the Ancients.

For Arisa's character profile see page 46.

MALIK HAUT-TARVEL

Malik haut-Tarvel is an expert from the Imperial Ministry of Technology; his field of expertise is the Ancients, especially their technology. He is a homogeneous declinist who believes there was a single Ancients race that slowly collapsed over millennia. He (correctly) surmises that the Droyne and Chirper species who are endemic to Charted Space were originally seeded by the Ancients. His role here is to determine the size of the Travellers' find and work out if they need to be eliminated to preserve the secrets of the Ancients.

As his title suggests, haut-Tarvel comes from noble stock. His family are unimaginably wealthy, owning whole worlds in the Core sectors. With the galaxy at his feet, haut-Tarvel chose to dedicate himself to archaeology and the study of the Ancients. He considers himself to be a refined, academic archaeologist – why go grubbing around in the mud looking for ruins and relics, when you can just read the accounts and records made by the great archaeologists of yore. The old masters covered the ground much more thoroughly than he could ever hope to – the true science of archaeology is consulting the records, weighing theories against each other and coming up with new hypotheses based on the established evidence. As far as haut-Tarvel is concerned, the question of the Ancients is very close to being settled. There is already plenty of Ancients archaeology to examine, so why bother looking for more? Given a choice, he would prefer to spend his time reading and debating.

However, even wealthy nobles like haut-Tarvel must do their duty to the Iridium Throne. There may be a wealth of Ancients archaeology to be studied and classified but the Imperium has an interest in the Ancients beyond the purely scientific. Ancients relics like black globe generators are of vital importance to the Imperial Navy. Haut-Tarvel's aunt Mari is an admiral; she had him assigned to the Ministry of Technology so he could review newly-discovered Ancients relics for their military potential. He is too self-obsessed to realise but Mari had her reasons for planting a reliable family member in the Ministry. Mari has designs on the Iridium Throne and possessing a unique Ancients weapon could be the leverage she needs to unseat Emperor Strephon. Half the great ruling families have similar ambitions.

Reluctantly, haut-Tarvel accepted his new posting in the ministry. As the Spinward Marches are generally believed to be the former seat of the Ancients empire, he travelled on board one of the family's six luxury cruisers to the 'barbaric, uncultured frontier'. He normally resides on Regina, where he is a fixture at university soirees and social functions. He likes to sneer at other archaeologists and use his family and naval connections to hint at secret knowledge and access to restricted information. Notably, he knows Professor Ujinka and her assistant Juni Volsang. He made a clumsy pass at Volsang two years ago and considers Ujinka to be a misguided catastrophist. He met Vlen Backett once, long ago, and found the man to be an uncouth trader who dabbled in archaeology.

Haut-Tarvel's role in this adventure is partly as comic relief and partly as an antagonist for the Travellers to overcome. He is the least dangerous of the three interrogators and the Travellers may be able to use him as a hostage or pawn.

Appearance: Malik is pale with light brown hair flecked with gold. He bears a distinct resemblance to Emperor Strephon – he is related to the royal family through his mother's side – and wears fine suits of Vegan transilk and a chest full of medals, noble titles and awards.

MALIK HAUT-TARVEL

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	46

TRAITS				—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	7		Admin 2, Advocate 1, Animals 0, Art (write) 2, Carouse 1, Deception 1, Diplomat 2, Drive 0, Electronics (remote ops) 2, Electronics (sensors) 2, Gambler 1, Investigate 2, Language 3, Melee (blade) 2, Recon 1, Science (archaeology) 3, Seafarer 0, Survival 0, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	7	EDU	11		
END	7	SOC	12		
EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Rapier (2D)				

Playing Malik:

- Be as snooty and effete as possible.
- Lecture the Travellers on your eccentric theories; condescend to them if they disagree.
- Always protect your own reputation.
- Remember – you are always right. If the evidence contradicts you, then someone is plotting against you and tampering with it.
- Therefore, he believes the Travellers are somewhere on a continuum from 'deranged madmen' to 'idiot buffoons who have no idea about history' to 'liars who are trying to discredit his theories'. He cannot even conceive of the concept that they are telling the truth. They must be lying. He will try to divide the Travellers and play them against each other until they admit they are lying to him.
- Have a wine glass in hand; sip from it and gesture with it.

Personality: 'Insufferable' more or less sums haut-Tarvel up. He is a spoiled brat who happens to have the backing of a massively influential family, the Imperial Navy and Ministry of Technology. He is convinced of his own innate superiority. Haut-Tarvel believes all civilisations go through an inevitable cycle of revolution, expansion, consolidation, stratification, ossification, and finally decline, and that the Imperium is moving through ossification towards decline. This justifies his appalling arrogance and spoiled behaviour – he is, he argues, a product of his time. The whole Imperium is about to slide down a long slope into decay and anarchy, just as the Ancients did millennia ago.

Goals:
- Analyse the Travellers' accounts and discoveries to determine their military significance.
- Make sure your cherished theories about the Ancients' slow decline into extinction are vindicated. Pick holes in any account of living Ancients or a war between different Ancients.
- Save your own skin.

GALEN

The other two interrogators assigned to the Travellers' case are powerful and influential people: Arisa is a secret operative of the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service and haut-Tarvel is a noble with connections to the navy and Ministry of Technology. Their word carries great weight; they can draw upon the resources of mighty organisations and hold considerable sway over policy.

Galen is something else entirely. He does not officially exist – there are no records of his name in the registry of any world. He holds no title or military rank; he is not on any Imperial payroll or in receipt of any official gift or bequest. In effect, he is a private citizen of the stars but holds an Imperial Warrant. Documents such as the one in Galen's possession are extraordinarily rare, as they permit the bearer to act in the Emperor's name and use the Emperor's authority. With a warrant, the bearer can cut through bureaucracy and make on-the-spot decisions without having to wait for authorisation from the government. Most warrants are limited in scope, granted to expedite matters in cases of disaster or war where the normal machinery of government has collapsed. Galen's warrant simply states that he acts for the Emperor 'in matters of state security'. In effect, he is a trouble-shooter-at-large for the Imperium; he and the few others like him have the duty of protecting the Imperium against 'destabilising forces'.

Galen is also a powerful psion. Although the Imperium suppresses the use of psionics in general, and bans the establishment of Psionics Institutes, there are two secret schools where psionics are studied for the good of the state. Galen comes from one of these institutions, on distant Terra, where he learned to probe the minds of criminals and traitors.

His role here is to ascertain whether or not the Travellers are telling the truth and to eliminate the threat of these supposed 'living Ancients' if possible. The Imperium has endured for 1,000 years, and is built on the remnants of two even older empires of Humaniti – no alien force can be allowed to threaten human hegemony over the stars.

GALEN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	44

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	10	Admin 1, Advocate 2, Athletics (dexterity) 2, Astrogation 1, Awareness 3, Deception 1, Diplomat 1, Electronics (computers) 3, Electronics (sensors) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 4, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 2, Investigate 4, Jack-of-all-Trades 3, Leadership 2, Mechanic 1, Medic 1, Melee (blade) 2, Melee (unarmed) 4, Navigation 1, Persuade 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 2, Recon 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Survival 2, Tactics (military) 2, Telekinesis 3, Telepathy 4, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	14	EDU	10	
END	10	SOC	10	
PSI	15			

EQUIPMENT	Enhanced Vision (TL14), Neural Comm (TL14), Psi-Drug (special) **Weapons:** Gauss Pistol (3D, AP 3, Auto 2) **Armour:** Cloth (+8) or Concealed Tailored Vacc Suit (+8)

Playing Galen:
- Pretend to care about the Travellers but have no more regard for them than an entomologist has for insects pinned in a case.
- Disbelieve nothing; seem to accept the wildest stories and ask the Travellers for more details. Soak up information like a sponge.
- Blink slowly and deliberate, as if you have to remind yourself to do so.
- Cow the Travellers by using your superlative unarmed combat skills to humiliate them.

Appearance: Galen is a middle-aged man with iron-grey hair and sad eyes. He wears a rumpled business suit and carries a leather satchel slung over one shoulder, appearing friendly in a distracted, distant way; he has the air of a man perpetually disappointed with the universe. A close examination of his skin reveals the presence of hundreds of fine scars, almost invisible thanks to repeated cell-regeneration therapies. Some of these scars are plainly the result of cybernetic modification or plastic surgery but others are marks left by blades and weapons fire.

Personality: Galen is a committed servant of the Imperium, trained from a young age to preserve the status quo. His personality is akin to that of a honed and polished scalpel – he does what is necessary to deal with the situation at hand. He is a sociopath with psionic empathy, so he can sense the emotions of others without sharing them himself.

THE GASH

When built back in 1087, the ship was the Imperial Battle Cruiser *Gaesh*, registry number 95278. She was the 17th ship of the *Kinunir*-class (see *High Guard*, page 159) to be built and the third and last to be completed at the General Shipyards at Regina. All four of the hulls constructed at the General Shipyards suffered significant problems – the fourth ship, the *Adda Dubsar*, was scrapped before it was ever launched, while *Gaesh* showed problems right out of the gate. Its misaligned jump grid meant it never managed to reach jump-3 and its reactors were unstable and could not produce enough power to run both manoeuvre drive and weapons.

All *Kinunir* ships were designed to carry Ancients defensive screens called black globe generators, from a cache of such devices discovered at Knorbes. While these globes offer virtually invincible defence against energy weapons, the globes proved difficult to integrate into human ships. All *Kinunir*-class vessels suffered problems that could be attributed to the globes; when coupled with the shoddy workmanship of the General Shipyards, it was a recipe for disaster.

When the *Gaesh* proved unfit for service, it was decommissioned in 1098 and placed in a polar orbit above Pixie. She was stripped of her weapons, drives, main reactors and precious black globe, and turned into an orbiting prison hulk. The decommissioning process was done hastily and brutally. The *Gaesh* was unceremoniously gutted, acquiring the nickname of 'the Gash' in the process because of the open spaces left in the hull from the removal of the drives.

Today, the Gash is an ugly, broken place to be. Most corridors were stripped of almost all salvageable material; the floor is a metal grille, the walls covered with exposed piping, wiring and the scars where components were removed, and only one in four lights remain. The gravity still works but most gravity plates were stripped, so the remaining plates must pull triple duty. There is a constant whine just within the range of hearing and the gravity is 'lumpy', varying between 0.8 and 1.2g even within the same room. Migraines and nausea are common among crew and prisoners.

SECURITY SYSTEMS

Security on board the Gash is comparatively light, as there is no easy way off the ship. Unlike a planet-bound prison, where an inmate might jump a fence and run off into the wilderness, this prison is surrounded by the most effective containment system ever – hard vacuum.

There are security cameras in all corridors, connected to the security station on B deck. These cameras are monitored at all times but the guards are not always attentive. Roll 6+ on 2D for guards to notice suspicious activity on a monitor, applying the Traveller's Stealth or Deception skill as a negative DM. If the guards notice, a patrol arrives in 1D minutes.

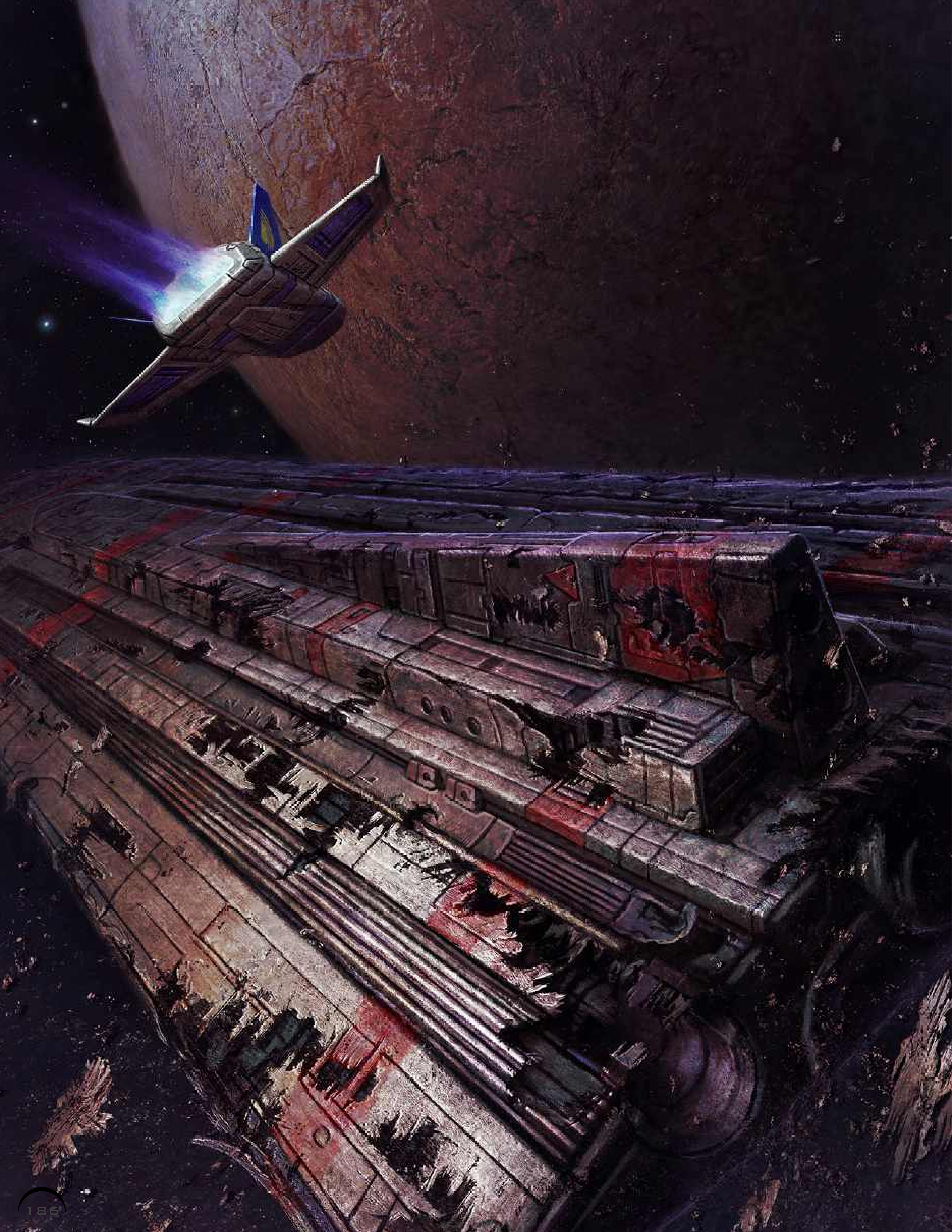
All cells are wired with hidden microphones; the guards can eavesdrop on any conversations within the cells they wish to hear.

A DECK

A deck was once officer country and the ship's bridge. The upper section, located beneath the dorsal fin, formerly contained the bridge, computer room, administration and sensor operations, as well as the ship's galley and officer's mess.

The computers and control consoles from the forward section were removed when the ship was decommissioned and the computer room is now used for storage but the administration section and galley are still in use. The bridge has been refitted for use as a monitoring station; computer screens display video feeds from security cameras throughout A, B and C decks.

The officer's quarters are now used as accommodation for the ship's guards. The Gash has a crew complement of 20 – some 14 guards and six specialist staff (see page 192). The ship has plenty of room, so all guards have their own stateroom. Unlike the rest of the ship, most of the fittings on A deck were retained during the decommissioning process, so life on board the Gash is surprisingly comfortable for the crew.



Observation Room: The former bridge. From here, the crew can watch video feeds and listen to bugs in the prison cells. In an emergency, all iris hatches and bulkhead doors in the ship can be closed from this room.

Communications Room: The ship's communications hub, used to signal other vessels. While the Gash is a secret facility, many ships in the Pixie system know about it. If the Gash does not send an automatic 'all's well' signal to the Pixie naval base every eight hours, a security team is automatically dispatched to investigate.

Galley: The ship's galley prepares food for both crew and prisoners. There is little difference between the meals served for the prisoners and those given to the warden himself.

Warden's Quarters: Warden Hawberk's rooms were formerly the captain's cabin and the first officer's cabin – she had an internal door installed to provide more living space.

Storeroom: This contains items confiscated from the prisoners, including the Travellers' equipment and the Ancients suppression device possessed by Gaius Labre (see page 188). It is locked using an electronic combination lock – only the warden knows the code. Overriding the lock requires a Very Difficult (12+) Electronics (computers) check (1D minutes, INT).

Guest Quarters: Six rooms are allocated as 'guest quarters' for special investigators, medical staff, technicians and other irregular visitors. Arisa, haut-Tarvel and Galen are all assigned quarters in this section.

Guard Ready Room: At least two armed guards are stationed here at any time, ready to respond to any alarms or problems.

Observation Deck: The aft observation deck was once dominated by the huge window, that gave a panoramic view of space behind the ship, and was used for official functions and meetings by senior crew. In battle, huge armour plates swung into position over the window, protecting this weak spot from attack. When the *Gaesh* was decommissioned, the armour plates were locked in position and then both the external plating and internal window removed, leaving the locking mechanism and a thin layer of hull plating to contain the ship's atmosphere. Overriding the locking mechanism would result in sudden and complete depressurisation of A deck; the lower decks might also be affected if the ship's iris hatches do not seal promptly. The Travellers can use this as a distraction or escape route.

B DECK

On other Kinunir-class vessels, this middle deck contains the ship's small craft, like air/rafts, marine orbital drop capsules and pinnace docking bay but these vehicles were removed from the *Gaesh*. A lot of this deck is given over to storage now; crates of freeze-dried food, water, toiletries and other supplies are stacked in the cavernous wounds that were once hangars. The prison cells are on this deck; most cells were formerly crew quarters but troublesome prisoners may be placed in solitary confinement in the ship's old brig.

Prisoner Quarters: Cells on board the Gash are spartan but not actively tortuous. Most prisoners share a room with another inmate. Each room contains two bunks, a sink and a small fold-out table. In some rooms, there is a display screen for watching videos – a heavily restricted library of entertainment programmes is available from the ship's computer.

Large Quarters: Some cells were originally larger barracks used by the ship's marine squads. The Travellers are placed in one of these shared cells, in the hope they will talk amongst themselves and their conversations can be recorded by the guards. Each of the larger cells contains bunk beds for 12 people, a shower and bathroom facilities (concealed behind a plastic screen), a table and chairs, and a display screen.

Brig: The ship's brig was the only room on this whole deck left unchanged in the decommissioning process. The brig consists of three cells and a guard's post, which is manned at all times if there is a prisoner in solitary confinement.

Sickbay: While several guards are trained in basic first aid, the prison lacks a doctor. There is a high-quality autodoc in the sickbay but if a prisoner needs medical care beyond its capacity, a naval doctor is flown in from the naval base.

Gym: The ship has a well-equipped gym with treadmills, weights machines, exercise bikes and even a fencing piste (for imprisoned nobles).

Cargo Elevator: The elevator that links the decks still works but is very slow and makes a loud grinding noise when in operation. The crew prefer to use inter-deck ladders and iris hatches when moving from deck-to-deck; the cargo elevator is only used for moving cargo

Vehicle Airlocks: These airlocks have been welded shut and cannot be opened.

Drop Capsule Tubes: Once, the ship would invert itself and launch marines through these tubes. The capsule tubes are still mostly in working order but the end of each tube has been sealed with a welded cap.

Aft Airlocks: The aft airlocks still function but activating them sounds an alarm on A deck.

Security Control Room: This room has been stripped of furnishings and equipment but most of the internal wiring is still intact. With the right tools and a Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check (1D minutes, INT), it is possible to switch off the alarms or override any iris hatch or airlock on B deck.

Pinnace Dock: The Kinunir-class vessels all carried a pinnace; the one belonging to the *Gaesh* was sold off

ANCIENTS SUPPRESSION DEVICE

This gadget is a small featureless brass rod but, when closely examined, several warm spots can be found along the rod's length. Pressing these sections in the correct order activates the rod, causing it to project a cone-shaped field that suppresses electronic devices. The rod's range and intensity can be adjusted by varying pressure on two of the control sections but they are inversely related – increasing range reduces intensity by a proportional amount, as shown on the Suppression Device table. The range and intensity values shown may not total more than five.

Suppression Device

Range Options	Intensity Options
+1: 1m cone	+4: Suppresses bioelectric activity; acts like a stunner (3D, Stun) on living creatures
+2: 10m cone	+3: Disrupts simple electrical devices (lights, heaters, TL6 or less)
+3: 100m cone	+2: Disrupts complex electronic devices (computers, microelectronics etc, TL8 or less)
0+4: 1km cone	+1: Disrupts highly sensitive electronic devices (NAS detectors, high-tech computers, high-TL devices)

For example, setting it to a 100 metre cone means it can only suppress complex and supersensitive devices at best.

when the ship was decommissioned. The pinnace dock is now the main airlock for the prison; new inmates and supplies are brought on board via this large bay.

C DECK

C deck was the heart of the ship when in use, containing the ship's main drives, weapon banks and crew quarters. The weapons have obviously been removed from the *Gaesh*, as have the ship's landing legs – the *Gaesh* is no longer rated for atmospheric re-entry, so the whole leg armature was removed along with the particle beams. The original intent was for crew quarters to be converted to more prison cells but the prison population never rose to anticipated levels, so C deck remains uninhabited and largely unused.

This section was stripped of everything valuable when the ship was gutted, turning it into a maze of twisting narrow corridors that end in empty rooms or dead ends where a sheet of metal has been welded across the passageway to block off a section that has been torn out. On the forward port side is the one functional system on this deck, the ship's garbage desiccation and disposal system. Inmates are rarely permitted on this deck, except for trusted prisoners permitted to work on garbage disposal or collect cargo from the storage bays.

The former day room, once a crew lounge, has been converted into an interview room for interrogation of the Travellers. This lounge has been stripped of all furnishings other than a table, some chairs and a larger seat connected to a lie detector and other sensor equipment.

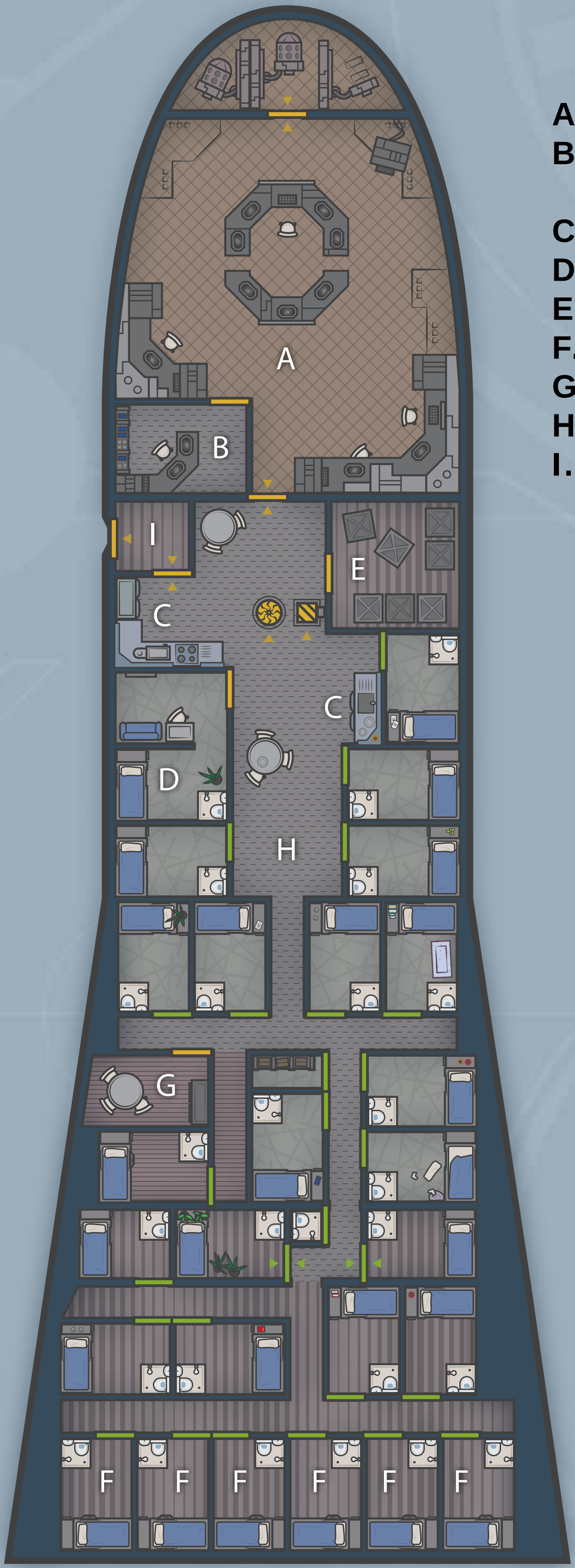
Garbage Disposal: The garbage disposal system works by exposing waste to vacuum, freeze-drying it and sucking out the air, then compressing it into a cube and launching it into the atmosphere of the planet below so it can burn up. The garbage disposal system can be used as an exit from the ship but opening the access hatch sounds an alarm on A deck. The would-be escapist must also disable the garbage crusher or be squashed into a small cube inside the airlock.

Storage Bays: There is little useful equipment in the storage bays; the guards are careful to keep tools and weapons well away from the prisoners.

Drive Rooms: The ship's manoeuvre and jump drives were formerly housed here. These rooms are now sealed off from the rest of the ship and open to space. The *Gaesh*'s only remaining drives are eight low-powered attitude thrusters attached to the exterior hull. These thrusters allow the ship to change position and maintain orbit but are not powerful enough to move it at speed.

THE GASH

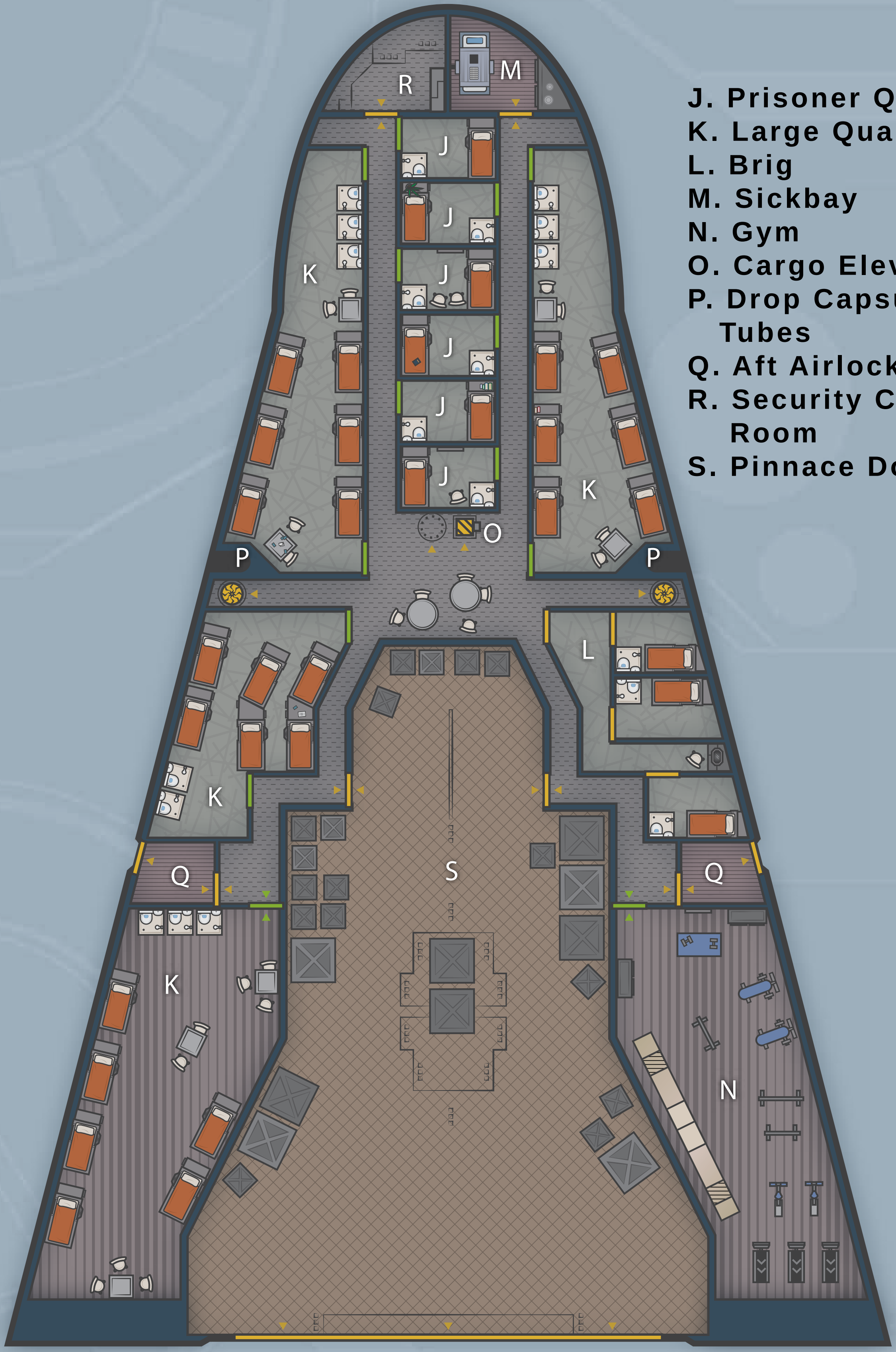
A DECK



A. Observation Room
B. Communications Room
C. Galley
D. Warden's Quarters
E. Storeroom
F. Guest Quarters
G. Guard Ready Room
H. Observation Deck
I. Airlock

THE GASH

B DECK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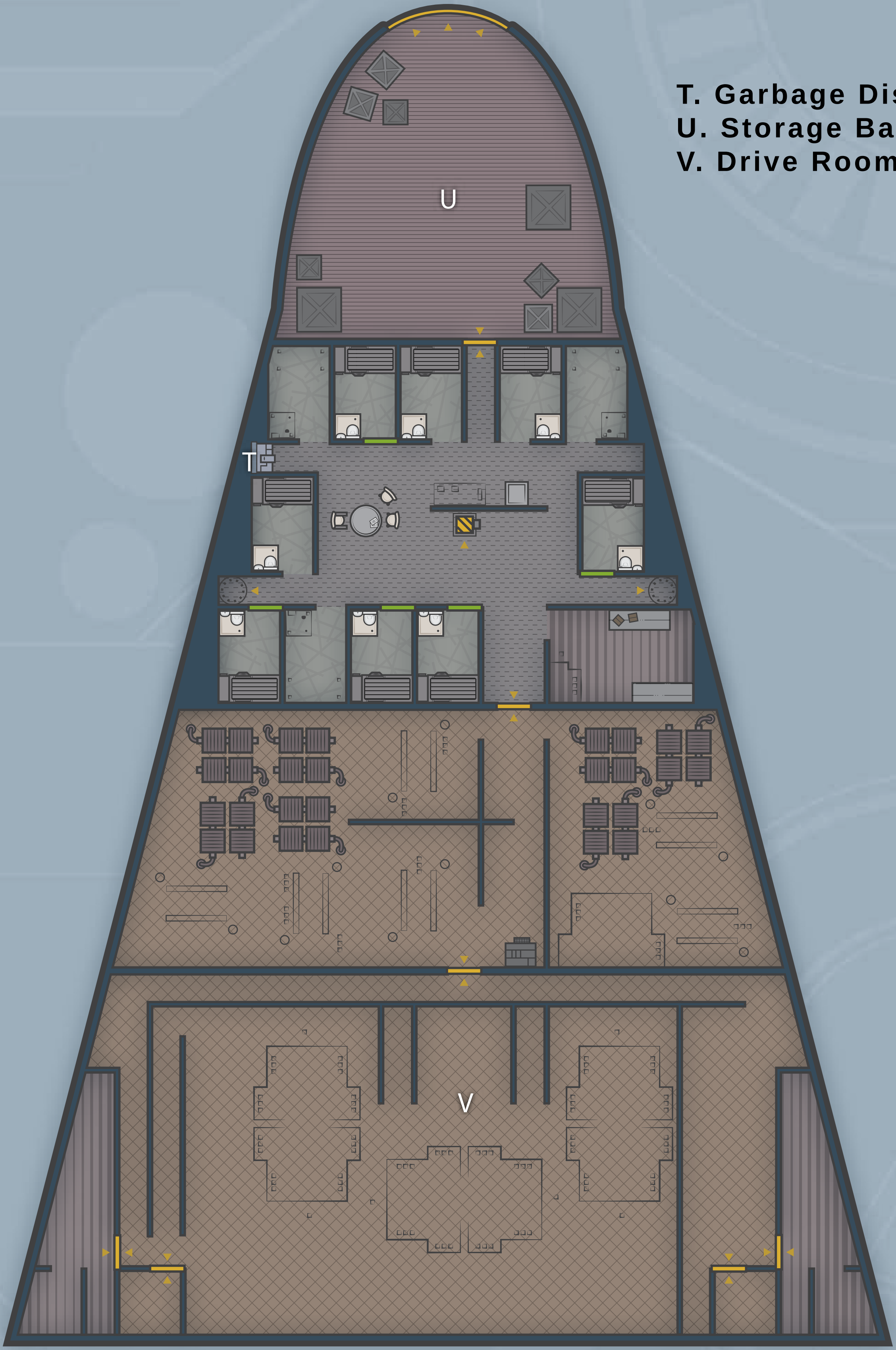
J. Prisoner Quarters
K. Large Quarters
L. Brig
M. Sickbay
N. Gym
O. Cargo Elevator
P. Drop Capsule Tubes
Q. Aft Airlocks
R. Security Control Room
S. Pinnace Dock

THE GASH

C DECK



T. Garbage Disposal
U. Storage Bays
V. Drive Rooms

CREW OF THE GASH

There are 20 permanent personnel on the Gash – six senior staff and 14 guards.

The guards are naval staff, recruited from the nearby base. They are under orders not to interact with the prisoners in any way outside of normal operations. All the guards wear helmets and black armoured suits when on duty on B deck. They never beat or mistreat the prisoners; the Gash has been host to nobles, dignitaries, scientists and other political prisoners in the past, so all inmates are treated with respect.

The guards are armed with stunners, body pistols and cutlasses. At any time, there are at least one or two guards on station in the observation room on A deck, two in the ready room on A deck, one in the brig control room on B deck and another 1D-2 throughout the rest of the ship. There will also be 1D-2 awake but off duty and the rest are sleeping.

WARDEN HAWBERK

Being warden of a political prison requires a delicate balancing act. Today's disgraced noble might be tomorrow's planetary count, as political fortunes wax and wane. Hawberk carefully maintains her distance from the prisoners, keeping them healthy, safe and contained. She has managed to tread the line so far. She is a nervous, cautious woman who avoids confrontation whenever possible, secretly harbouring political ambitions of her own and squirreling away useful nuggets of information picked up by the hidden microphones.

- Hawberk may help the Travellers if she believes it is in her best interest.
- She has access to the prison computer, so is the first person to be alerted if the microphones pick up interesting conversations between the Travellers.

CHIEF GUARD FALKRIK

Falkrik is an ex-naval officer. A skirmish with Aslan *ihatei* left him crippled and half-dead. His crew managed to jam him into a low berth and freeze him in time, which kept him alive as the ship limped home to Pax Rulin. Falkrik's injuries were extensive enough that not even the best naval doctors could restore him to full health and while he could return to duty, he would never get a front-line position again. He was assigned to the Gash as it was seen as an easy position.

CELL SECURITY

Each prison cell has a range of security measures:

Obvious Security Camera: There is a large security camera mounted in or outside each cell. This camera is a big, chunky, low-TL holocamera. The camera monitors the central area of each cell, so the Travellers can avoid the camera's gaze by clustering in the corners or hiding behind bunks. The cameras were deliberately placed to encourage this – it herds the Travellers into the area monitored by the concealed cameras and microphones.

Concealed Security Camera: Each cell includes at least two hidden cameras. These are high-tech spying devices, virtually invisible to the naked eye. These cameras are concealed in display screens, light fittings, wall screws and so on. Finding a concealed camera requires a Very Difficult (12+) Investigate check (INT). Again, these cameras are monitored from B deck; roll 6+ on 2D to see if suspicious activity is noticed by the guards, applying the Travellers' lowest Deception or Stealth as a negative DM.

Microphone: Each cell includes at least three voice activated microphones. They are extremely hard to detect, requiring a Formidable (14+) Investigate check (INT) to find. Any conversations in the cell not masked by other noise are detected and recorded. The computer algorithms that analyse the recordings are smart enough to strip out repetitive noise, so classic tricks like running a shower will not prevent the Travellers from being spied upon. The only way to defeat the microphones is to use unexpected noises like shouting, which will attract the attention of the guards anyway. The microphones are capable of detecting keywords and alerting the guards. The keyword list is customised for each prisoner – initially, for the Travellers, the keywords include Ancients, Alahir, Holcess, Zhodani, Ine Givar, Vlen Backett and Ven Yasha.

Cell Walls & Ventilation Ducts: The walls are made of metal and all access panels are welded shut, as are the entrances to the vent ducts. There is no easy way to creep out of a cell.

Cell Door: The cell doors are magnetically locked. To open a cell, a guard must call the observation post on B deck and request that the door be opened. Forcing the door requires an Impossible (16+) STR check.

GUARD

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	7	Admin 0, Advocate 0, Athletics (dexterity) 1, Electronics 0, Gun Combat (energy) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Investigate 0, Mechanic 1, Medic 0, Melee (blade) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Pilot 0, Science 0, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	5	EDU	7	
END	8	SOC	8	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Body Pistol (2D), Cutlass (3D), Stunner (3D, Stun, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+10)

WARDEN HAWBERK

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	38

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	8	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Astrogation 2, Athletics (dexterity) 1, Broker 0, Carouse 0, Diplomat 2, Electronics (sensors) 2, Leadership 1, Steward 2, Streetwise 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	6	EDU	8	
END	5	SOC	8	

Playing Hawberk:

- Play Hawberk as a fat, nervous spider. Her fear is delicately balanced against her ambition. She wrings her hands, hunches her shoulders, and looks around before speaking. She is always absurdly polite and respectful, even when dealing with prisoners.

Falkrik has the disconcerting habit of treating the prison hulk like it is still a functional ship of the line. He berates guards for leaving hatches open, failing to run maintenance checks on disabled systems, like the fuel lines, and any other breach of naval discipline. No-one is quite sure if Falkrik still hopes to convince the admiralty he is fit for service on board a starship, if his injuries have unbalanced his mind, or if he is just a stickler for discipline who takes his frustration out on the guards.

- Falkrik despises civilians, especially nobles who do not 'pull their weight' in service to the Imperium.
- He gets on well with other naval personnel, especially those who have had their careers cut short.
- His cybernetic limbs and skull implants make him look like a lurching cyborg monster and the synthetic flesh that covers his scorched bones is slightly too pink and plasticky to look normal. His cybernetic servos whir slightly as he moves.
- If the Travellers try to escape the station by force, then Falkrik will be their main opposition. If they try to talk their way off, they may be able to convince the naval officer he is helping to avert a threat to the whole Imperium.

ADMIN CLERK POAD

Poad could have turned up at the Gash as a prisoner or as staff. He was a clerk over at the Pixie naval base but there were certain irregularities about purchasing orders that went across his desk. Nothing was ever proven but many suspected that Poad was skimming money off the top. The navy transferred him to the Gash.

Poad finds the prison intensely boring. He knows that the Imperial Navy does not trust him and that he will never be given another assignment or allowed to leave – at least, not without having his memories chemically scrubbed. He has tried to curry favour with Warden Hawberk by suggesting they use information from prisoners to advance the warden's political ambitions but, so far, Hawberk has resisted. Poad entertains himself by sneaking down to B deck and talking to prisoners in the hopes of picking up useful gossip.

- Poad is an ambitious little toad. He has given up on his naval career; if the Travellers bribe him with promises of vast wealth or Ancients technology, he may well help them escape.
- He is terrified of Galen; he is the only person on the Gash who can even guess who Galen is and what he represents.

CHIEF GUARD FALKRIK

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	52

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	9	Advocate 1, Astrogation 2, Athletics (dexterity) 2, Electronics (comms) 1, Engineer (m-drive) 2, Engineer (power) 2, Flyer 0, Gambler 0, Gunner (turret) 2, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Investigate 1, Jack-of-all-Trades 1, Leadership 2, Mechanic 2, Medic 0, Melee (blade) 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 1, Science 0, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	6	EDU	6	
END	6	SOC	6	

EQUIPMENT	
	Functional Prosthetic Arm, Functional Prosthetic Legs

Playing Falkrik:

- Move with a limp. Bark orders. Be irritated with everything.

ADMIN CLERK POAD

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	36

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	9	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Broker 1, Carouse 1, Deception 1, Electronics (comms) 3, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (sensors) 1, Persuade 2, Pilot 0, Vacc Suit 0
DEX	9	EDU	11	
END	7	SOC	8	

Playing Poad:

- When playing Poad, lick your lips and be slightly smarmy and odious.

COMMS CLERK SAMPSON

The prison's communications clerk is a deep cover Zhodani agent; her real name is Zenj. Her entire surface personality is a psionic construct. Her memories, her thoughts, her entire self was engineered to pass Imperial scrutiny, while the real Zenj lurks beneath the surface, manifesting only in dreams or when triggered by specific circumstances. She is a sleeper agent, created by the Consulate at a young age and smuggled into the Imperium. She has been a spy since she was five years old.

Zenj's sleeper personality may be triggered if she learns the Travellers know about the Ancients. The Zhodani Consulate have much greater interest in the Ancients than the Imperium. While the Third Imperium primarily views the Ancients as a historical curiosity or source of useful technology to be salvaged, the Zhodani consider the Ancients to be the architects of their civilisation and have launched long-range core expeditions based on recovered Ancients data.

- Zenj's surface personality, Kaila Sampson, is that of a blandly professional and unremarkable naval officer with a talent for communications operations. She is competent enough to get promoted but not so skilled as to get noticed. She is best described as 'reliable'.
- Zenj herself is a fervent Zhodani believer, who considers the whole Imperium to be a realm of sick, violent children.
- Zenj is prepared to help the Travellers if she learns they had dealings with the Ancients.

GUARD CHAON

Chaon is the one of two guards assigned to watch over the Travellers. He is a young, fresh-faced naval recruit; this is his first tour of duty. He is impressionable and eager to please. Warden Hawberk has instructed all the guards to ensure the prisoners are kept happy and comfortable and Chaon has taken these instructions literally – he can be convinced to bend the rules of the prison for the Travellers.

GUARD SHAIRU

Shairu's a veteran marine, on temporary attachment to the Gash while she waits for her real assignment, a heavy cruiser, to return to Pixie after a long patrol along the Zhodani border. She just wants to get through this assignment without any trouble and as far as she is concerned, 'trouble' involves escape attempts. She instantly clocks the Travellers as potential troublemakers and resolves to keep a close eye on them.

COMMS CLERK SAMPSON

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	32

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	6	Admin 1, Athletics (dexterity) 1, Electronics (communications) 2, Electronics (computers) 1, Electronics (remote ops) 1, Electronics (sensors) 1, Engineer 0, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	8	SOC	7	

Playing Sampson:

- Be polite and efficient.
- Keep your head down, avoid making eye contact.

ZENJ

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	10	Admin 1, Astrogation 2, Athletics (dexterity) 2, Deception 2, Drive 0, Electronic (communications) 2, Electronics (computers) 3, Electronics (remote ops) 1, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (j-drive) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Investigate 2, Jack-of-all-Trades 2, Mechanic 0, Medic 0, Melee (unarmed) 2, Pilot 0, Recon 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Survival 1, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	EDU	10	
END	8	SOC	2	

Playing Zenj:

- Speak and move quickly, as if you are trying to cram as much activity as you can into the shortest time.
- Put on a Zhodani accent (Russian will do as an 80's evil-empire analogue).

GUARD CHAON

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	22

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	5	Admin 0, Advocate 0, Astrogation 1, Electronics (comms) 1, Engineer 0, Gun Combat 0, Investigate 0, Mechanic 1, Medic 0, Melee (blade) 1, Pilot 1, Science 0, Steward 1,Vacc Suit 0
DEX	7	EDU	5	
END	8	SOC	4	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Body Pistol (2D), Cutlass (3D), Stunner (3D, Stun, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+10)

Playing Chaon:

- Salute everyone.
- Bounce on the soles of your feet with enthusiasm. Snap out responses like a cadet responding to a drill sergeant.

GUARD SHAIRU

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	38

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	9	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Athletics (endurance) 2, Carouse 0, Drive 0, Electronics (comms) 1, Engineer 0, Explosives 1, Gambler 1, Gunner 0, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Investigate 0, Leadership 0, Mechanic 0, Medic 0, Melee (blade) 2, Navigation 1, Pilot 0, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	7	EDU	6	
END	8	SOC	7	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Body Pistol (2D), Cutlass (3D), Stunner (3D, Stun, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+10)

Playing Shairu:

- Be suspicious of everything. Never trust the Travellers.
- Keep your stunner ready at all times.
- Watch the Travellers for tricks.

Normally, she and Chief Guard Falkrik would be close allies but he is consumed by jealousy of her career and the two have clashed in the past. They argue frequently over petty matters – she considers him to a washed-up martinet, he thinks she is sloppy and undisciplined.

OTHER PRISONERS

The prisoner population on the Gash varies considerably. Few prisoners are here for long – they are either transferred to a conventional prison facility or released. However, two prisoners are serving life sentences on the Gash and are officially 'detained at the Emperor's pleasure'.

The guards permit prisoners to communicate with each other, for the benefit of the hidden microphones.

BARONET VULIS

The former ruler of a district of Violante, a world in the Aramis subsector, Vulis was an infamous tyrant hated by his subjects. He was overthrown by a revolution and begged the Imperium for shelter under the terms of the ancient treaty signed by his ancestor when his world joined the Imperium. His request was granted – the seal of the Imperium is sacrosanct – but as punishment for his crimes, he was sent to the Gash to live out the rest of his life. His prison is kept secret for his own protection, as there are thousands of people on Violante who still want Vulis dead.

Vulis has come to accept that he will never leave the Gash alive, so spends his time reading and composing poetry. It is uniformly dreadful. He is an excellent guide to the prison hulk, as he knows all the regular staff and the basic layout of the ship; if the Travellers befriend him, he can give them a capsule description of their new home.

He shares a cell with Ruatair.

CAPTAIN RUATAIR

A former captain in the planetary navy of Denoam, Ruatair turned pirate and attacked merchant shipping within the independent state of the Federation of Arden. The Imperium hunted him down and arrested him but allies in the planetary navy managed to arrange a stay of execution. Ruatair will be held in the Gash until his fate is decided. He knows that an appointment with the gallows – or the firing squad, or the airlock, depending on which of his many accusers finally gets custody of him – awaits and he is desperate to escape.

BARONET VULIS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	55

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	7	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Animals 0, Art 0, Carouse 3, Deception 2, Diplomat 1, Electronics (comms) 1, Flyer (grav) 1, Gambler 2, Persuade 0, Streetwise 2
DEX	7	EDU	9	
END	5	SOC	10	

Playing Vulis:

- Vulis has nothing left but his pride and his art. Quote terrible poetry at the Travellers.
- Be unexpectedly paranoid – these strangers could be assassins from Violante.
- Demand that they address you by your proper title.

CAPTAIN RUATAIR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	41

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	7	INT	9	Admin 1, Astrogation 2, Diplomat 2, Engineer (j-drive) 2, Electronics (comms) 1, Electronics (computers) 1, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (power) 2, Flyer 0, Gambler 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Gunner (turret) 2, Leadership 2, Mechanic 1, Pilot 0, Science 0, Tactics (naval) 2, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	9	EDU	11	
END	7	SOC	8	

Playing Rutair:

- Pepper your dialogue with naval terminology and phrases.
- Pace like a trapped beast; rant about how you were betrayed and mislead, and how you thought you had a Letter of Marque permitting your attacks, how it is politics, all politics, that has led to your downfall.

He has sympathisers within the navy at the Pixie naval base, who pass messages via a bribed guard to let him know about supply runs and prisoner transfers. If the Travellers befriend him and agree to aid in an escape, he can let them know when ships are arriving at the pinnace dock on B deck.

He shares a cell with Baronet Vulis.

THOIC ABSHUR

Thoic is a journalist and writer for newsfeeds and journals on Regina, specialising in military analysis and new technologies. Ironically, it was her series of reports on the lacklustre performance of the *Kinunir*-class that dragged that debacle into the public eye and led to the cancellation of the four final vessels in the original production run of 24 ships. She also correctly speculated that the *Kinunir* was being used as a test bed for a new defence system, the Ancients-derived black globe generators, although she was unable to discover the nature or provenance of the new technology.

Six months ago, Abshur wrote a speculative essay on the old Longbow (Long Baseline Observation Window) project, an experiment in the 800's that linked a network of sensor platforms to replicate a sensor dish some 42 billion metres across, which permitted the Imperium to observe objects up to 1,500 parsecs away. The original Longbow was used to observe Zhodani traffic in the galactic core; Abshur speculated that a second Longbow array could use newer jump-6 couriers and cutting-edge computing to create an even more powerful telescope. Unwittingly, Abshur had stumbled upon one of the Imperium's most closely-guarded secrets – there is indeed a Longbow-2 project underway.

The Imperial authorities assumed someone must have leaked this ultra-secure military secret to the journalist, so Abshur was arrested and detained until she revealed her source. The article was suppressed and will never see publication. While Abshur claims she has no insider knowledge of Longbow-2, the security services are unconvinced of her innocence, so she is being detained 'at the Emperor's pleasure' without trial and without limit on the length of her incarceration.

As an expert in the intelligence community, Abshur can fill the Travellers in on the relationship between the IISS, the Ministry of Technology, the Ministry of Justice and the Imperial throne; she can also tell them about the military significance of Ancients technology and their likely fate.

Abshur has a cell to herself.

THOIC ABSHUR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Female	33

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	4	INT	9	Admin 0, Advocate 2, Art (write) 3, Broker 1, Carouse 2, Deception 2, Diplomat 1, Drive 0, Electronics (comms) 2, Electronics (computers) 1, Flyer 0, Gambler 0, Investigate 3, Persuade 2, Recon 0, Sensors 2, Science 0, Streetwise 2
DEX	5	EDU	7	
END	4	SOC	7	

Playing Thoic Abshur:

- Abshur hopes that the Imperium will eventually see sense and agree she was just immensely, horribly unlucky and release her. Until then, she is careful to keep out of trouble.
- At the same time, she is cursed with curiosity. If the Travellers hint that they know something about the Ancients, she will be unable to resist finding out more.
- Play her as a cynical journalist; she is dying for a cigarette but such items are banned on board the Gash.

EVAN HAUT-UISHIR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	39

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	8	Admin 1, Advocate 2, Animals 0, Athletics (strength) 2, Art 0, Carouse 2, Deception 2, Diplomat 0, Drive 0, Electronics 0, Gun Combat 0, Melee (blade) 3, Persuade 2, Recon 1, Stealth 3, Steward 1, Streetwise 2
DEX	10	EDU	9	
END	10	SOC	12	

Playing Evan:

- Smile, all the time.
- Use elements from the Travellers' personalities and backstories to make Evan seem more sympathetic and convincing – if one of the Travellers has a grudge against the Imperium, then Evan changes his story so that his double conspired with corrupt Imperial officials.

EVAN HAUT-UISHIR

Haut-Uishir is the fourth son of the Count of Bellion; he is also the serial killer called the Laughing Man, responsible for the deaths of 16 women and the maiming of six others. When the police finally identified the eccentric young noble as the killer, the count arranged for his son to be taken off world and incarcerated in the Gash. As far as the population of New Rome know, popular young Evan is off on the Grand Tour of the core worlds.

Unlike the rest of the prisoners, who are not deemed dangerous and are permitted to use the gym and other facilities on the prison hulk, Evan is kept locked up in solitary confinement. Furthermore, he has been fitted with a shock collar that incapacitates him if he steps outside his cell without a guard present to override it with a special control wand. Disabling the collar requires a Very Difficult (12+) Mechanic check (INT).

Evan is charming and charismatic. He is an adept liar, who claims he had a double made to protect him against assassins but the jealous double had him imprisoned here and took his place. If the Travellers can help him escape, he can reclaim his true identity and reward them greatly. If they do release Evan, he goes on a rampage through the prison.

Unsurprisingly, Evan has a cell to himself.

TAEK, YALIN AND OSVOK

These three are smugglers and drug-dealers, captured by the Imperial Navy and temporarily held on the Gash until sentencing. They have no idea about Imperial politics, the Ancients, spies or anything else – they are just thugs who got caught.

Their role in this adventure is as comic relief and muscle – if the Travellers go for an escape attempt, then recruiting Taek, Yalin and Osvok gives them extra cannon fodder.

GAIUS LABRE

The Travellers have met Gaius Labre before – all the way back on Regina, in *Bodysnatchers*. He is one of Ven Yosha's men, assigned to the mission of assassinating Professor Ujinka. He was captured by Imperial Intelligence on Regina and brought to the Gash for questioning. The Ancients artefact he used to shut down Ujinka's security system was confiscated and is now being held in the storeroom on A deck (see page 187).

TAEK, YALIN & OSVOK

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Humans	Males	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	4	Broker 0, Carouse 1, Drive 0, Engineer 0, Explosives 0, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Stealth 0
DEX	5	EDU	4	
END	6	SOC	3	

Playing the Smugglers:
- Taek fancies himself as the smart one; rub your goatee and come up with 'clever' plans.
- Yalin's the fat one; he is always stuffing his face.
- Osvok's the tough guy; growl at everyone and speak in a throaty, gruff voice.

GAIUS LABRE

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	35

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	5	Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1
DEX	6	EDU	6	
END	9	SOC	3	

Playing Labre:
- Go into a frenzied paroxysm of rage when you see the Travellers for the first time.
- Do whatever you can to get to the Travellers. If you cannot reach them physically, get under their skin emotionally and make their lives hell.
- Snarl and growl like a trapped beast.

Labre was a two-Credit thug and assassin, who has no idea about Ancients, Imperial Intelligence or pan-galactic conspiracies. His eccentric criminal boss sent him to bump off some wrinkled old academic, the job went wrong and suddenly Labre is on a prison hulk with no trial and no hope of release. For months, he has turned the events over and over in his mind, and come to the conclusion that the Travellers are to blame. He thinks they were Zhodani agents or Ine Givar or some other big bad enemies of the state, and that Imperial Intelligence mistook Labre for them. The Travellers ruined his life and he has dreamed of revenge for months.

PRISON ROUTINE

Life on board the Gash follows a strict routine. Each day, the prisoners are served breakfast in their cells by a guard. They are then given a two-hour session in the gym, followed by a four-hour period of rest and reading, during which lunch is served. In the afternoon, there is another session in the gym before dinner. Trusted prisoners are permitted to perform other light duties, like collecting supplies from A deck or performing basic maintenance under the supervision of a guard. The ratio of guards to prisoners means that the Travellers are under virtually constant supervision.

TRAFFIC

A supply shuttle visits the prison every three days, bringing fresh water and food. These supplies are unloaded at the pinnace dock and must be carried up to the storerooms on A deck by hand, using a mix of guard and prisoner labour.

Prisoner transfers happen more rarely; when a prisoner shuttle arrives, all current inmates are ordered to return to their cells.

There is a scout training base at Pixie; scout ships from that base often dock at the prison hulk during exercises and training missions; when one scout is skimming from the gas giant below, another scout might adopt a high guard position over the gravity well.

THE PIXIE SYSTEM

The Gash is in a geostationary orbit over the north pole of the Pixie system gas giant. This region is under a traffic exclusion order – vessels coming within 10,000 kilometres of the prison hulk are automatically recorded and warned to change course.

The mainworld is a small vacuum world inhabited by miners. The major settlement surrounds the huge, busy starport and naval base. The base itself is defended by another *Kinunir*-class cruiser as well as small scout ships.

REFEREE ADVICE

This adventure is designed to be a low-key breathing space between the weird chase and bizarre alien environments within Grandfather's pocket universe, and the final battle with Seven that comes in the final two adventures. There are three main plotlines that can be explored.

Firstly, the Travellers can try to convince Arisa to trust and help them. This is primarily a matter for roleplaying.

Alternatively, the Travellers can break out of the prison hulk. This requires learning more about the Gash, finding a way off the prison and either stealing a ship or reclaiming their own vessel.

The third plot progresses in parallel to the other two – the psionic copy of Grandfather grows in strength throughout. Over the course of this adventure, the players need to learn that:

- One of the party has become Host to a copy of Grandfather.
- Seven is still trapped within the collapsing pocket dimension.
- Seven will be resurrected by his Family Archive if he dies within the pocket dimension – the only way to defeat the renegade Ancient is to destroy the Family Archive before it escapes.
- Grandfather managed to extract the location of the Family Archive from Seven's mind before Grandfather was killed.

GRANDFATHER'S HOST

During this adventure, the psionic copy of Grandfather becomes more active. There are three handouts for this adventure – give these to the Traveller at the appropriate intervals. Each handout gives the Traveller added skills and abilities, temporary powers that will disappear at the end of *Secrets of the Ancients*.

While the Traveller is reading each handout, the Host temporarily comes under the control of the Referee. This should be used as an opportunity for Grandfather to 'explore' his new form. The Traveller behaves in a bizarre manner during these periods – disassembling equipment, obsessively examining his extremities, trying to fly, babbling in Droyne, casually answering impossible questions and so on.

If Grandfather's Host is in extreme danger, or if you need a *deus ex machina* to get the Travellers out of a fix, Grandfather can exert himself. The psionic copy has effective INT 15, EDU 15, PSI 12, with any relevant skills at level 6.

WELCOME BACK

Read the following to the Travellers:

You are still alive.

It comes as a shock. The last thing you remember with any clarity was falling through the second portal above the Droyne world. After that, there is a confusing, blurred set of memories – marines in battle dress, an oxygen mask being pressed into your face, the smell of antiseptic, muffled voices and then, over and over, the sickening lurch of jump!

You come back to full consciousness on board a cramped shuttle. Your legs and arms are manacled to the chair you sit in. There is an external viewport, through which you can see a huge gas giant turning slowly beneath you. Armed guards walk up and down the narrow aisle, checking on each of you.

The shuttle approaches a battered, broken ship that must be a wreck or prison hulk. As the shuttle manoeuvres to line itself up with an aft docking port, you catch a glimpse of the Imperial Sunburst emblazoned on the ship's hull.

The shuttle docks and an airlock hisses open. The guards unclip your manacles and lead you off the shuttle. The prison hulk smells of sweat and recycled air. 'Welcome to the Gash' grunts one of the guards. 'You don't exist here.'

YOU DON'T EXIST HERE

Arisa meets the Travellers as they leave the shuttle (if Arisa died earlier in the campaign, replace her with Orcio). She explains their situation:

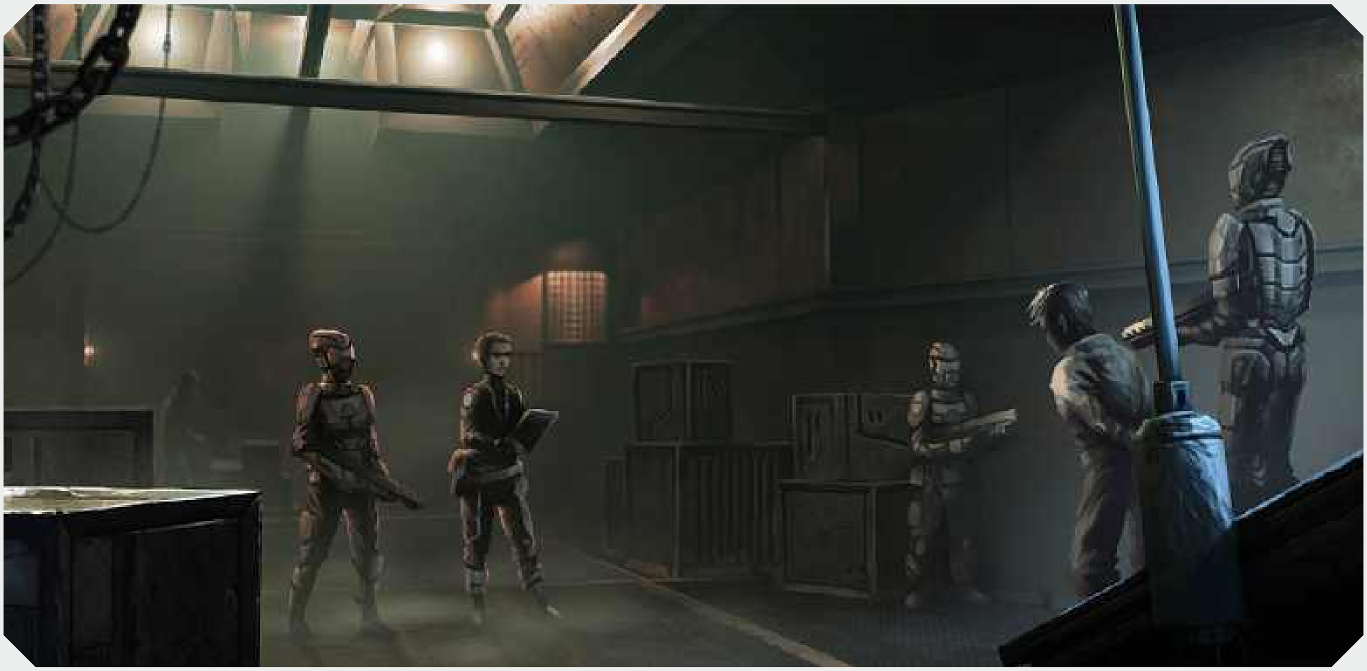
- The Travellers are being detained at the pleasure of the Emperor. They will remain here on the Gash until future notice.
- They will be questioned on their activities since the death of Vlen Backett on Regina. Attempts to deceive or conceal information from the interrogators will not be tolerated.
- If the Travellers co-operate with her, there is every chance they will be granted a pardon and walk free from the Gash.
- Assuming the Travellers are not violent or argumentative, they will be permitted to share a large cell and given basic liberties while incarcerated. If they are... difficult, then their time on board the Gash will not be so pleasant.

This is an excellent time to give Handout 5 to Grandfather's Host. While Grandfather is in control of the Host's body, he looks around in surprise and confusion and mutters under his breath in Oynprith.

Arisa escorts the Travellers to their communal cell.

EQUIPMENT, SHIPS AND OTHER MATTERS

The Travellers have been stripped of all equipment and have nothing except clothing and footwear. Bags, each containing a towel and other toiletries, are left on the bunks for the new prisoners. Any equipment that the Travellers brought out of the pocket universe is now being stored in the storeroom on A deck.



If the Travellers left the pocket universe on the Droyne rocket, then it was abandoned and burned up in the atmosphere of Boughene. However, if they escaped on the *Star Hunter*, then it is now in orbit five kilometres away from the Gash.

LIFE IN PRISON

The Travellers have several hours to discuss their predicament, meet other prisoners in the gym or recreation area and explore B deck under the watchful eye of the guards. Remember, their conversations are being eavesdropped on by the hidden microphones; the guards *want* the Travellers to talk and give away their secrets. The interrogations start the next morning.

INTERROGATION

In these scenes, the three interrogators – Arisa, haut-Tarvel and Galen – attempt to learn what the Travellers know about the Ancients. These scenes are critical to the Travellers' chances of convincing Arisa to aid them – see page 203 for more details on this.

There are three phases to the interrogation. Firstly, Arisa and haut-Tarvel interrogate the Travellers as a group. Secondly, the Travellers are split up and interrogated individually. Thirdly, if the interrogators are still not satisfied, Galen telepathically probes each of the Travellers.

For each interrogation session, the Travellers are marched down to the interrogation room on C deck. There are two guards present during each interrogation, as well as the interrogators. Unless otherwise noted, the interrogations are watched through cameras and monitored via microphone.

REVIEW OF EVENTS

In this interrogation, Arisa and haut-Tarvel meet with all the Travellers. Haut-Tarvel does most of the talking; he demands that the Travellers describe everything that happened since they received the message about Vlen Backett's death. Specific questions asked by the interrogators might be:

- How do the Travellers know Vlen Backett?
- Have they had any contact with the Zhodani?
- What happened at Professor Ujinka's house on Regina?
- How did they find the Ancients vessel at Boughene?
- What happened on Boughene?
- What happened in the pocket universe?
- What do the Ancients want?
- How active are the Ancients in the modern universe?
- What was Vlen Backett?

Throw in other questions as needed – Arisia is mostly interested in the relationship between the Ancients and Humaniti, while haut-Tarvel's questions concentrate on the Ancients themselves and their civilisation. At this stage, however, just focus on the facts. Use the interrogators to remind the Travellers of elements they may have forgotten from earlier adventures.

If the Travellers ask why they are being detained, haut-Tarvel sniffs and informs them that they are being held at the Emperor's pleasure until their loyalty to the Imperium is confirmed and they provide a full account of events at Regina, Alell, Boughene and the pocket universe. They may be freed if the interrogators are 'satisfied with their answers'.

Once you have run through all of the Travellers' experiences to date, the interview ends. Move onto the first few Events in the Prison (page 202), then run Divide and Conquer as appropriate.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

In this series of interrogations, the Travellers are split up. Each Traveller is brought down alone to the interrogation room, where they meet one of the three interrogators. Each of the interrogators has their own agenda in the interrogations. Pick the Travellers who will have the most interesting interactions with the each interrogator – a Traveller who always argues with authority figures should be paired with haut Tarvel, a Traveller who is willing to betray the others might work well with Galen and so on.

Arisa: The scout's sole aim is finding out the truth. She asks the Travellers about their interactions with Vlen Backett, Gand Holcess and the Ancients. She wants to know if the Ancients are a threat to the Imperium and, if so, do the Travellers have a way to deal with the threat? Keep an eye on Convincing Arisa (page 203) during these scenes, as this is the best opportunity for the Travellers to gain her trust.

Haut-Tarvel: The arrogant noble's goal is to prove his pet theories about the Ancients to be correct and expose the Travellers as liars. He tries to pick holes in their account of their adventures and demands they agree that the Ancients are composed of multiple different species and that figures like 'Grandfather' or 'Seven' are just myths.

Galen: The sinister interrogator wants to divide the Travellers and expose weaknesses between them. His ultimate goal is to find the truth and he believes the best way to do that is to sow dissent. He will use his telepathic powers on any non-psionic Travellers to pick up secrets from their minds and use these secrets against them. Play on existing tensions within the group – if two Travellers do not trust each other, have Galen question each of them and hint that if one of them turns on the rest of the group, Galen will intercede to protect his informant.

He also tries to identify which of the Travellers is Host to Grandfather.

MIND-PROBE!

If the Travellers are still imprisoned by the time they have all been questioned individually, then Galen moves to more direct methods. There are two ways to proceed with this.

If any of the Travellers have expressed doubt or fear about Grandfather's Host, then Galen picks the Traveller who has shown the most concern about the Ancients. He brings that Traveller down to the interrogation room and offers to make a deal. His interrogation and mind-probes of the Travellers have convinced him that both Seven and Grandfather are a threat to the Imperium. Grandfather seems bent on defeating Seven – but what happens when Seven is dealt with? The Imperium cannot tolerate the existence of a living Ancient. The Third Imperium of Humaniti is like a delicately balanced star system, with the various power groups – the fleets, the dukes, the megacorporations – orbiting around the Iridium Throne.

Grandfather would perturb the social order like a black hole plunging through a system.

Galen wants to use Grandfather. He instructs the Traveller to help Grandfather put his plan to defeat Seven into action. Galen will arrange for the Travellers to be allowed to 'escape' from the prison and the Traveller should then stick close to Grandfather and help the Ancient – until Seven is finally dealt with. At that moment of triumph, Grandfather will be distracted and vulnerable. The Traveller should take that chance to kill Grandfather.

If the Traveller manages to assassinate the last of the Ancients, if the Traveller kills Grandfather, then Galen promises they will be rewarded beyond their wildest dreams.

The Traveller must make the decision on the spot. If they agree to kill Grandfather when the opportunity arises (in the last adventure, *Grandfather Lies*), then Galen has them escorted back to the cell – see Escaping the Gash, on page 204. If they refuse, then Galen has the Traveller placed in solitary confinement and moves onto the next option.

The second option is killing Grandfather here and now. Galen orders Grandfather's Host brought to the interrogation room on C deck, where Galen awaits. Sitting on the table in front of the interrogator is a gauss pistol.

Unless the Traveller acts immediately, Galen shoots the Host through the brain with a gauss needle, killing both the Traveller and Grandfather. To survive, the Traveller needs to do something – either letting Grandfather's personality come to the fore and wielding psionic powers or fighting back against Galen. If Grandfather dies here, the campaign is at an end – the other Travellers will be executed or transferred to another Imperial prison from which there is no escape.

The most likely turn of events, if the Travellers come to this scene, is that Grandfather blows Galen through a bulkhead with a telekinetic punch and the adventure turns into an escape attempt, with or without Arisa's aid.

EVENTS ON THE PRISON

Run these events as circumstances demand in roughly the order presented. Assume that one event happens every 6D hours on board the prison hulk.

BROWNOUT

The Gash has had problems since it was launched, especially in its power distribution subsystem. These problems reoccur periodically, in the form of brownouts. During a brownout, roll 1D on the Brownout table to determine which subsystem fails.

PRISON BRAWL

All prisoners are allowed some time in the ship's gym each day. Gaius Labre takes advantage of this time to start a brawl with the Travellers. While working out with some weights, he flings one of the dumbbells at Guard Chaon, stunning him. Labre then goes after the Travellers with murderous intent.

PROCESSING

One of the Travellers is brought up to A deck by the guards. There is a minor irregularity in one of the Travellers' personal records that has to be resolved. This is a minor bureaucratic problem, easily resolved but it gives the Traveller a chance to see A deck and encounter Warden Hawberk and Comms Clerk Sampson, who reviews the case.

Brownout

1D	Effects
1	All the lights on the deck go out, apart from a few emergency lights.
2	Gravity on the deck fails. The Travellers are now in freefall.
3	Sensor grid fails. The microphones and cameras no longer function. Guards are scrambled from A deck, arriving in 1D minutes to restore order.
4	Magnetic door locks fail. The cell doors are still locked but can be overpowered with a Very Difficult (12+) STR check.
5	System blowout. The power fluctuations cause a relay to overload and explode. Anyone standing near the relay suffers 2D damage; the smoke and fumes mean that any prisoners in nearby cells must be evacuated to another section of the deck.
6	Roll again twice and apply both results.

GALEN ARRIVES

A jump-6 courier arrives in-system and heads straight for the Gash. A passenger transfers to the station by shuttle, while the courier skims hydrogen from the gas giant below and jumps out again. The lone passenger is met at the B deck dock by the Warden and the guards but instead of heading up to A deck, Galen insists on first seeing the Travellers. He stands outside their cell, not saying anything but just watches them for a few moments in complete silence, as if weighing them up.

SUPPLY RUN

The regular supply shuttle from the Pixie naval base arrives at the hulk. The cargo from the shuttle must be unloaded and it is customary for some of the better-behaved prisoners to help with this. Pick two or three Travellers who have not made a nuisance of themselves; they are made to carry heavy loads up to A deck but get a better idea of the layout of the prison hulk as they do so.

SICK GUARD

Guard Chaon (page 194) falls sick while on duty outside the Travellers' cell. A successful Medic check suggests that he is suffering from 'Pixie dust', a bacterial infection of the lining of the lungs endemic to the recycled air on Pixie. The guard sways back and forth, has trouble breathing and finally collapses. There is a brief interval between Chaon's black-out and the other guards arriving that the Travellers can take advantage of.

ARRESTING SAMPSON

Using his telepathic abilities, Galen is able to identify Sampson as a Zhodani spy. He arrests her and has her thrown into a prison cell. Questioning Zenj (Sampson's Zhodani sleeper-self) gets the Travellers more information about the prison. Zenj may even accompany the Travellers once they escape the prison, offering them sanctuary in the Consulate once they deal with Grandfather.

CONVINCING ARISA

If the Travellers can convince Arisa of their good intentions, she can help them escape the prison hulk. Bringing Arisa around requires more than just a few Persuade checks, although you should call for them every so often as the Travellers talk with her. It also takes roleplaying and making the right arguments. Below is a checklist of items the Travellers need to bring up during their interrogations and convince Arisa of. If the Travellers mention an item, check it off the list.

The Travellers...
- Are not insane
- Are not plotting against the Imperium
- Are not working for the Ancients
- Are innocent victims of circumstances
- Are competent and capable individuals

Gand Holcess...
- Followed the Travellers to Boughene
- Was killed by Seven

Seven
- Is responsible for billions of deaths, such as the extinction of life on Beck's World
- Is trapped in the pocket universe, but will soon escape
- The Travellers have a means of dealing with Seven

The Prison
- The Travellers will be executed or indefinitely imprisoned
- Haut-Tarvel is an idiot who is only interested in his own theories and is not really listening to the evidence
- Galen is a dangerous psion
- Arisa is their only hope of survival

If the Travellers successfully make the majority of the listed arguments, then Arisa agrees to aid them by covering for their escape. See page 204.

ESCAPING THE GASH

The easiest way to escape the Gash is to have inside help. If Arisa, Galen or another character is helping the Travellers, they can provide assistance like:

- Disabling security cameras or cell magnetic locks.
- Sneaking weapons to the Travellers during interrogation sessions.
- Sneaking the Ancients technology damper used by Gaius Labre to the Travellers.
- Letting the Travellers know about visits by other ships.
- Arranging for a scout ship to visit the prison hulk at just the right time.
- Ordering guards to stand down or directing guards to the wrong place on board.
- Sabotaging security systems.

If the Travellers do have help, their escape attempt should go much more smoothly.

Escaping the Gash is a difficult prospect. The Travellers need to break out of their prison cells, deal with the guards and then find a jump-capable ship.

BREAKING OUT

The optimum time to break out is when the Travellers are already outside their cells, such as during a gym break, when helping move cargo or when coming back from an interrogation. Remember, there are guards present at all times, so the Travellers need to either arrange a distraction or be able to overpower at least two armed guards without being shot. The guards use their stunners first in any fight before switching to lethal force.

As soon as the alarm is raised, more guards arrive from A deck within 1D minutes for a minor incident (such as a brawl between one prisoner and a guard) or D3 minutes for a more serious incident.

Another possibility is for Grandfather to use his psionic or technological skills to help the Travellers escape. If possible, dissuade the Travellers from relying on Grandfather too much – he is not omnipotent, nor is he wholly in control of his Host. Any intercession by Grandfather should be mirrored by weird behaviour or injuries to the Host. The human brain is not designed to carry the telepathic mind-imprint of a mutant super-Droyne; the more Grandfather does through his Host, the more damage he does to the Host's brain.

IMPERIAL BACKING!

If the Travellers are able to convince both Arisa and Galen to aid them, then there is no need for an escape attempt. Instead, the Travellers are officially freed and given a scout ship. All their equipment is returned to them and Galen gives the Travellers his Imperial Warrant to speed them on their way.

STEALING A SHIP

If the *Star Hunter* survived the pocket universe, then it is floating in orbit some five kilometres away from the prison hulk. The Travellers can cross this distance by jumping off the prison hulk and floating across to the ship, using telekinesis or manoeuvring jets to adjust their course.

If the Travellers do not have their own ship, they need to steal one. Scout ships visit the prison hulk during training missions; alternatively, if the Travellers manage to seize the bridge, they can send a distress call. The prisoner and supply shuttles are not jump-capable but could be used to get the Travellers to the Pixie naval base where they can steal a ship from the orbital yards there.

Once the Travellers have a jump-capable ship, they can set off in pursuit of Seven in *The Dark Gate*.

THE DARK GATE

The seeds of our current situation were sown hundreds of thousands of years ago. The Ancients transplanted human populations from Terra to a dozen other worlds. On some planets, they left technological relics and those relics inevitably accelerated the development of those cultures. On others, the transplanted humans were left to fend for themselves.

The accelerated cultures grew faster, expanding out from their homeworlds at a rate proportional to their technological advantages. Could the success of the old Vilani empire be the result of a deliberate plan by the Ancients? Did they give the Vilani enough of an advantage that they would conquer the stars but run out of drive as they ran into the vibrant, energetic Solomani?

Is our civilisation the result of a massive psychohistorical engineering project? Was the course of our development set by the Ancients when they planted our ancestors? Or is our Imperium a historical accident, a barbarian empire that sprang up in the ruins left by an earlier civilisation?

How do we discern the invisible currents of history?

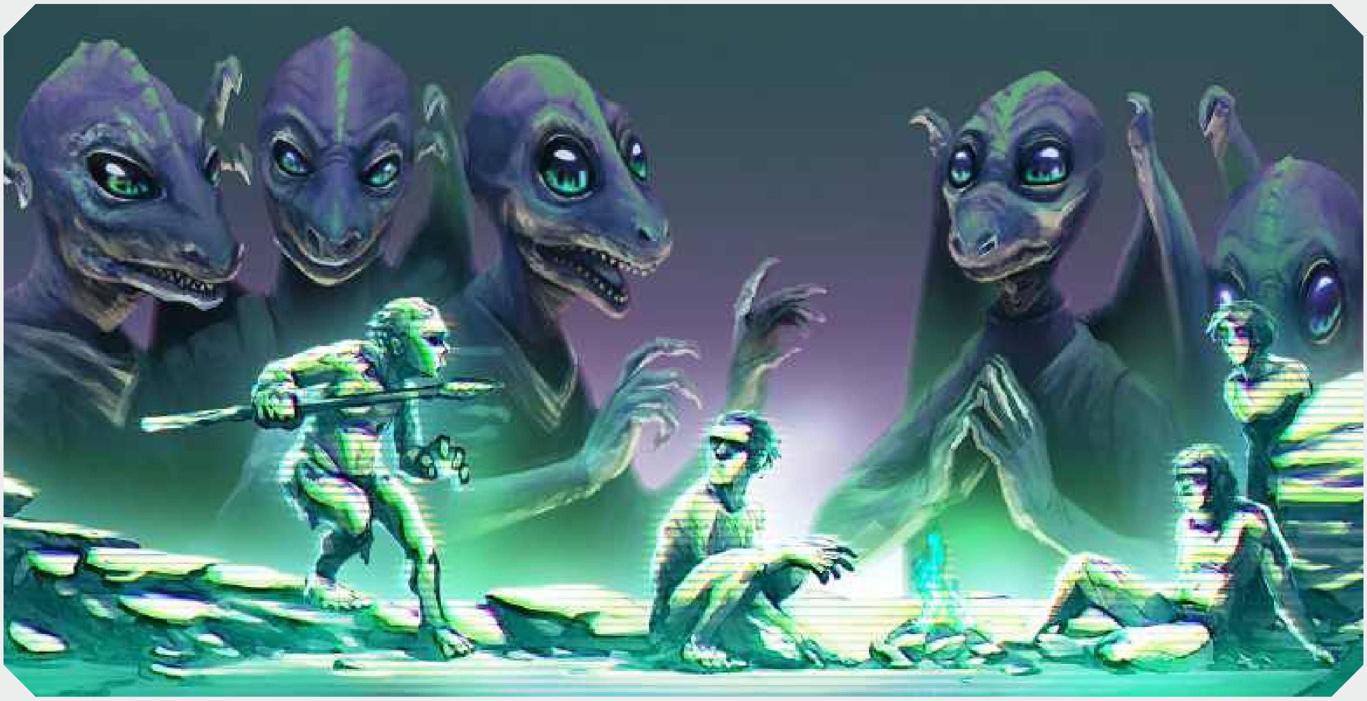
— The Ancients: A Psychohistorical Analysis, Unpublished Monograph by Professor Ujinka

Depending on how the Travellers dealt with the Imperial interrogators and escaped the prison, they may be:

- On the run from the Imperium, in a stolen scout ship.
- On the run from the Imperium, flying the *Star Hunter.*
- Working with the blessing of Imperial Intelligence.
- In a stolen scout ship but the Imperium has yet to start hunting them.
- In a similar situation not covered here.

Grandfather's psychic imprint continues to grow in strength and influence. The Host's dreams become more detailed, pointing the way to Seven's secret base. The Travellers know it is located in Uthe subsector of Gvurrdon, one subsector coreward of Regina. They will need to scan all the garden worlds in Uthe to identify the world seen in the dreams.

Grandfather's dreams also point the Travellers towards a hidden cache of Ancients artefacts. By default, this cache is located on Pixie itself; if getting to Pixie is not feasible due to the events of the previous adventure, the cache can be moved to Beck's World in Regina or Kousuesi in Uthe. This cache contains Ancients weapons and tools the Travellers will need to survive the challenges to come.



Getting to Uthe means travelling across the coreward quarter of Regina, crossing into Vargr space and exploring pirate-haunted systems close to the Imperial border. En route, they are intercepted by Vargr forces belonging to the 40th Squadron, who force the Travellers to travel to the fleet's base at Daeksuzaethukue in Uthe.

There, the Travellers meet a Vargr 'prince', Aethgors, who attempts to detain the Travellers as his 'guests'. While at Aethgor's palace, the Travellers are targeted by Seven's assassins. After defeating Seven's agents, they must persuade Aethgors to aid them. His scouts can identify the world the Travellers seek – it is Zoe, a world four parsecs coreward of Daeksuzaethukue.

At Zoe, the Travellers need to find the Dark Gate that leads to Seven's realm...

GRANDFATHER

At this stage of the adventure, Grandfather is capable of taking control of his Host's body whenever he wishes. The psionic seed planted by Grandfather has grown into a full-fledged personality. In effect, the Traveller *is* Grandfather… but this comes with a cost. Grandfather is a mutant Droyne and his super-intellect does not 'fit' into the human brain. Every time Grandfather takes control, his presence 'overloads' the Host's brain. A medical scan of the Host will show a massive spike in neurological activity and blood pressure when Grandfather manifests.

Explain to the Host that they can 'call upon' Grandfather whenever they wish, and that Grandfather can apply his astounding intellect or psionic abilities to any task, but that each time Grandfather is 'summoned', the Traveller permanently loses END -1. Grandfather cannot be summoned if this would kill the Traveller. The Referee can also have Grandfather manifest as a *deus ex machina* if circumstances warrant.

Even when Grandfather is 'dormant', the Traveller gains considerable benefits (see page 199) and when Grandfather is active, his powers are even greater. Assume Grandfather can accomplish any technological task so long as he has the necessary components and that he can make components from lower-tech materials given time. Grandfather's psionic abilities are equally potent – he has complete mastery of all known psionic talents.

INTERROGATING GRANDFATHER

If possible, the Referee should keep Grandfather 'off-stage' for as long as possible. Make sure the Travellers are the ones driving the plot, not an all-powerful character. However, Travellers being who they are, it is possible that they may pin Grandfather down and demand answers from him. If they do so, the first thing Grandfather points out is that he cannot be active for long – his Host's brain is incapable of emulating Grandfather's peerless intellect for extended periods, so they must keep any interview brief (remember that the Host loses END permanently for every few minutes of Grandfather's activity).

Grandfather explains the following in an efficient, clinical manner, using as few words as possible. Speak in sentence-fragments. Expect the Travellers to keep up. No excess verbiage. Pure information, not pointless debate.

- Seven is one of Grandfather's errant children and must be destroyed.
- The only way to stop Seven is to simultaneously destroy him and his Family Archive. Destroy him first and he will be resurrected in the Archive. Destroy the Archive first and he will build another. By luring him into the pocket universe, Grandfather was able to find the location of Seven's current Archive and prevent him from building another.
- Grandfather retrieved information about the location of Seven's Archive from the Ancient's memory. Garden world, neon-heavy atmosphere, sea slugs, Uthe. Find it!
- If the Travellers have not done so already, he urges them to find the supply cache before heading into Uthe.
- Now stop bothering him, he is busy using the Host's subconscious to plot his next move.

While it is extremely unlikely that Grandfather dies at this stage of the campaign, assume that he can transfer his mind into another Host if necessary.

VARGR GUARDS

There are several places where the Travellers may run into Vargr guards. Use the following:

VARGR GUARDS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	5	INT	7	Gun Combat (energy or slug) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 1, Investigate 2, Melee (natural) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Tactics (military) 1
DEX	9	EDU	7	
END	6	SOC	5	

EQUIPMENT	
	Pick one of: • Mesh (+2) and Autorifle (3D, Auto 2) • Flak Jacket (+5) and Rocket Launcher (5D+6, Blast 6, Scope, Smart) • Vacc Suit (+8) and Laser Rifle (5D+3, Zero-G)

DREAMS OF DISTANT WORLDS

In the pocket universe, Grandfather used a secret weapon against Seven. The orbital weapons platform masqueraded as a doomsday particle weapon, a huge anti-ship cannon designed to disintegrate Seven, but its real purpose was to steal Seven's most closely guarded secret from the monster's mind. It stole the location of Seven's Family Archive – and then trapped his rebellious son in the pocket universe. If the Family Archive is destroyed at the same time as Seven's physical body, the Ancient cannot resurrect himself.

Seven fought the weapon's intrusion into his mind. He was able to block Grandfather from extracting the exact location of the base, so all Grandfather got was fragmentary information. Grandfather himself had only milliseconds to absorb the information before Seven blasted the weapon's platform – and Grandfather – to atoms.

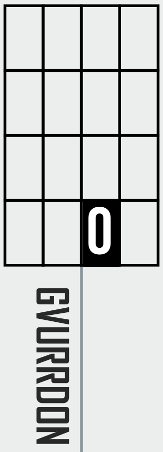
The dreams experienced within *In the Emperor's Name* describe the information obtained as follows:

A world. A garden world, Earth-like, shimmering oceans, green forests. Atmospheric composition includes an unusually high amount of neon. Gas giant, three moons, one of which is a captured iceball. Vargr, enslaving a minor race of amphibious sea-slugs. Uthe subsector, only a short distance. Deep beneath the crust, a hidden fortress. Seven's base. Seven's Family Archive.

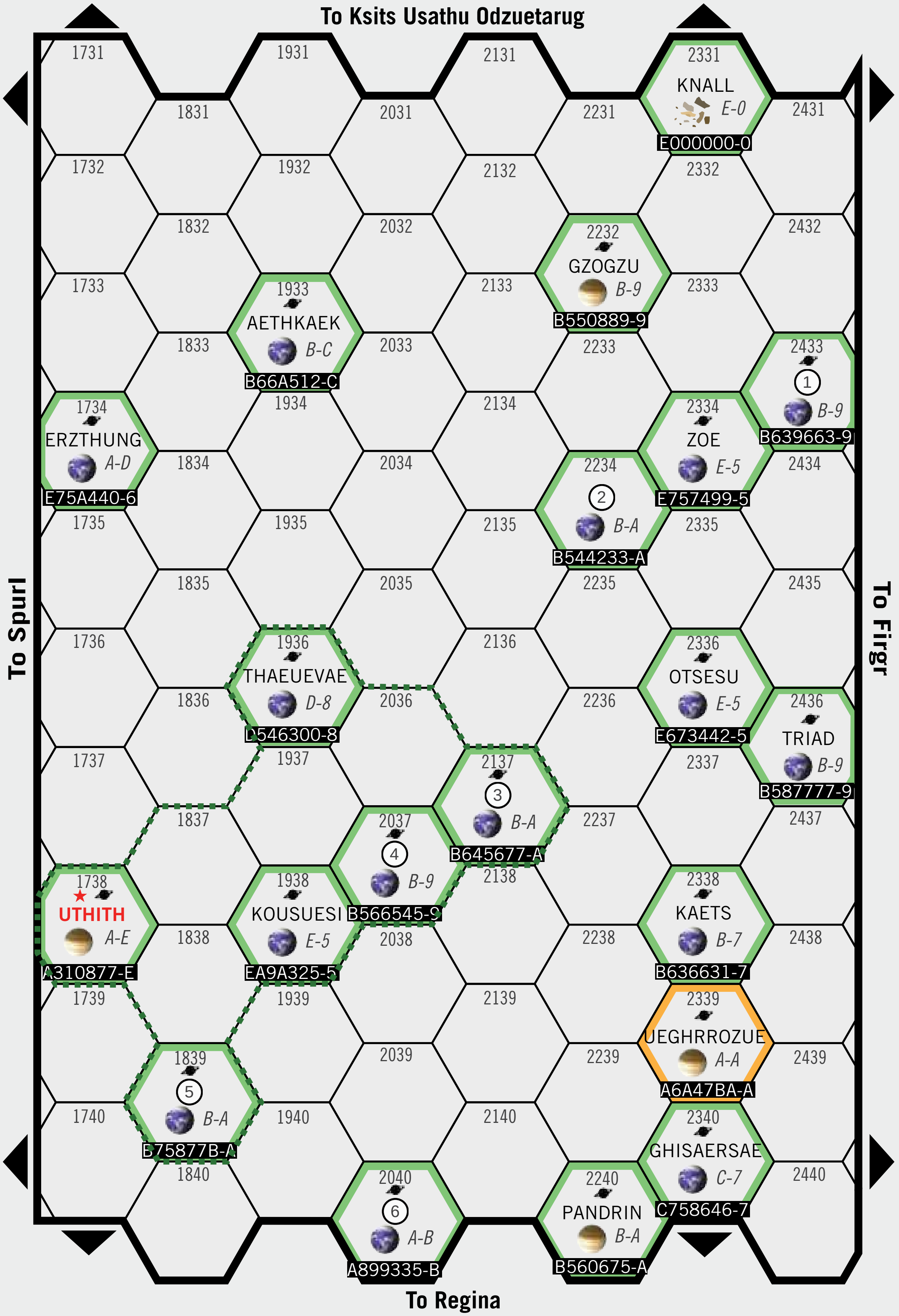
If the Travellers realise that they need to search the Uthe subsector for a garden world matching those criteria, then Grandfather's Host stops having the dream. Otherwise, the dream keeps repeating with greater intensity until the Travellers realise what is going on.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Forrodhkokh	0209		B75877B-A	Ag, Ga		40th Squadron	G
Thaeuevae	0306	C	D546008-C	Ga, Lo		40th Squadron	G
Urrlongonu	0407		B566545-9	Ag, Ga, Ni		40th Squadron	G
Daeksuzaethukue	0507		B645677-A	Ag, Ga, Ni		40th Squadron	G
Tinkaeghzzaklez	0604		B544233-A	Ga, Lo		Vargr	
Zoe	0706		E757499-5	Ga, Lt, Ni		Vargr	G
Ghisaersae	0710	C	C758646-7	Ag, Ga, Ni		Vargr	G
Triad	0806	N	B587777-8	Ag, Ga, Ri		Imperium	

A 'C' under the Bases column indicates a Corsair base, a starship operations facility that supports Vargr corsair or interstellar pirate fleets.



UTHE SUBSECTOR


To Ksits Usathu Odzuetarug
To Spurl
To Firgr
To Regina
1731
1831
1931
2031
2131
2231
2331
KNALL
E-0
E000000-0
2431
1732
1832
1932
2032
2132
2232
GZOGZU
B-9
B550889-9
2332
2432
1733
1833
1933
AETHKAEK
B-C
B66A512-C
2033
2133
2233
2333
2433
1
B-9
B639663-9
1734
ERZTHUNG
A-D
E75A440-6
1834
1934
2034
2134
2234
2
B-A
B544233-A
2334
ZOE
E-5
E757499-5
2434
1735
1835
1935
2035
2135
2235
2335
2435
1736
1836
1936
THAEUEVAE
D-8
D546300-8
2036
2136
2236
2336
OTSESU
E-5
E673442-5
2436
TRIAD
B-9
B587777-9
1737
1837
1937
2037
4
B-9
B566545-9
2137
3
B-A
B645677-A
2237
2337
2437
1738
UTHITH
A-E
A310877-E
1838
1938
KOUSUESI
E-5
EA9A325-5
2038
2138
2238
2338
KAETS
B-7
B636631-7
2438
1739
1839
5
B-A
B75877B-A
1939
2039
2139
2239
2339
UEGHRROZUE
A-A
A6A47BA-A
2439
1740
1840
1940
2040
6
A-B
A899335-B
2140
2240
PANDRIN
B-A
B560675-A
2340
GHISAERSAE
C-7
C758646-7
2440

Gas Giant
★ Imperial Naval Base
▲ Imperial Scout Base
▲ Imperial Scout Way Station
B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level

△ Research Station
Secure System
Amber Zone
Red Zone
X-boat Route

Asteroids (no atmosphere/water)
● Planet (dry)
● Planet (water present)
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ 40th Squadron Border

①: AERRKHUKHKAEKOUGUENGDOUNG
②: TINKAEGHZZAKLEZ
③: DAEKSUZAETHUKUE
④: URRLLONGONU
⑤: FORRODHKHOKH
⑥: OUGZDAELZOERRGH

Searching Uthe: Imperial library data lists data for the worlds of the Uthe subsector, although this data is untrustworthy and out of date. The Vargr Extents are notoriously chaotic; a world might change name and government a dozen times in as many years. Even population levels can change rapidly, as wars and pack migrations sweep across the stars. A quick search shows that there are eight garden worlds in Uthe.

Triad and Tinkaeghzzaklez can be quickly eliminated as contenders – they lack gas giants. Ghisaersae can also be struck off, as the planet is well surveyed and its moons do not match the specifications. The evidence for other worlds is inconclusive. While planets like Daeksuzaethukue are comparatively well trafficked by Imperial ships, there may well be a small colony of 'amphibious sea-slugs' in some isolated area.

WE NEED A SHIP

The Travellers may be in need of a jump-capable ship or want to trade their current vessel for something less traceable. Any high-traffic starport offers the possibility of obtaining a new vessel. The naval base at Pixie, for example, sees hundreds of ships coming and going, ranging from jump-4 x-boats and couriers to far traders to multi-megaton warships (although stealing an *Azhanti High Lightning*-class frontier cruiser is slightly outside the scope of this campaign!). Other excellent places to obtain a new ship include Kinorb, Ougzdaelzoerrugh and Triad.

OBTAINING A SHIP

The Travellers can obtain a ship in the time-honoured manner – by taking out a forty-year mortgage on a new vessel. In a pinch, Grandfather's Host (or Grandfather himself) can use psionic powers to convince a weak-willed bank manager to hand over the cash. This option is available only to Travellers who still have a good reputation or have items or information to trade. Revealing the location of, say, the Ancients cache (see page 210) could give the Travellers enough leverage to get a loan.

Alternatively, asking around the starport in Kinorb puts the Travellers in touch with Fiezel Lollops**,** a trader. Lollops is an experienced merchant but never got the hang of piloting. His previous crew quit in a disagreement over danger pay, so Fiezel is looking for a replacement set of deckhands for his far trader, the *Hosal Dhosa.* He intends to travel to Triad, a client state of the Imperium in Uthe, bringing a cargo of Imperial luxuries to sell to the culture-starved natives. If the Travellers sign on, they can fly the *Hosal Dhosa* around Uthe in search of Seven's base. Lollops offers them standard pay for starship crew, plus a Cr10000 bonus each once they arrive at Triad.

The *Hosal Dhosa* is a 200-ton far trader equipped with two double turrets in hardpoints. The rear turret has two pulse lasers, while the forward turret has a pulse laser and a sandcaster.

Playing Fiezel Lollops:
- He is an old free trader, with the swollen face and chubby body of a man who has spent a lot of time in zero gravity.
- Laugh and make really bad jokes and puns. Call the Travellers 'lads', 'girls' and 'mates'.
- Play him for laughs; he has no idea about the Ancients, Imperial Intelligence, the threat of Seven or anything else. He is just an ordinary Imperial citizen, caught up in events far beyond his comprehension.

STEALING A SHIP

Under normal circumstances, stealing a starship is a difficult task (see page 151 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook*). Even getting on board is challenging. If the Travellers try to steal a ship at a starport, they have to bypass the starport's security as well as the ship's own defences. If they try to hijack a ship, they have to get on board first and then overcome the crew.

However, there is an opportunity to steal a ship comparatively easily in the Pixie system. The naval base at Pixie is home to one of the Spinward Marches' pirate-hunting squadrons. Ships from this base patrol the coreward border of the Marches and escort ships on the jump route to Triad. There is a naval prizeyard on Pixie, a place where captured pirate ships are brought. Some of these ships are scrapped; others are refitted and auctioned off by the navy. The yard is only lightly guarded and some ships are still functional. If the Travellers break into the prizeyard, they can find a 100-ton scout ship that is fully fuelled and ready to take off. Roll 1D times on the Spacecraft Quirks table on page 164 of the *Traveller Core Rulebook* to determine the ship's state, alternating between the military and other two columns.

Another option is to hijack Janter Riles' courier ship.

TRADING FOR A SHIP

If the Travellers are in possession of a scout ship or other vessel, they can swap it for a new, 'clean' ship that the Imperium will not recognise. Such an exchange can be completed at any non-Imperial world or at an Imperial world with Law Level 4 or less (like Dentus or Yorbind). The trade is arranged by a Vargr fixer named Gvarney, a grizzled old ex-pirate. She offers the Travellers a battered old scout ship (again, roll 1D times on the Spacecraft Quirks table on page 164 of the *Traveller Main Rulebook* to determine the ship's state, alternating between the military and other two columns). The cost of the scout ship is MCr36.769, minus MCr3 per roll on the Spacecraft Quirks table. If the cost of the ship is less than the value of the Travellers' vessel, Gvarney offers a straight swap; if the battered scout ship costs more than the Travellers' ship, Gvarney wants the difference in price plus Cr500000. She will accept Ancients relics in trade.

IMPERIAL AID

The final option is for Arisa or Galen (see *In The Emperor's Name*) to provide an IISS scout vessel. This can happen even if the Travellers broke out of the Gash instead of being released; so long as the Travellers parted on good terms with one of the Imperial Intelligence agents, a ship can be provided. The Travellers are contacted by encrypted radio and informed that an unmanned scout ship is being left in orbit of one of the gas giant's moons near the Gash. On board, the Travellers find enough TL12 vacc suits and gauss pistols for all of them, plus Cr500000 in cash and an Imperial Warrant.

THE PIXIE CACHE

En route to Vargr space, Grandfather's Host has another psionic flash and they suddenly remember the location of an Ancients weapons cache. This cache was established after the Final Wars for the use of Grandfather's agents, so it almost certainly still exists. The Travellers can choose to ignore this cache if they wish but that means ignoring the possibility of finding something useful.

The cache's location is assumed to be on Pixie but can be transplanted to another world if necessary. The cache is hidden inside a shallow cave within a cliff face in the wilderness. Exploring the cave shows no sign of technology, other than a strangely flat surface at the very back of the cave. Touching this surface and sending the right psionic signal (any Traveller with the PSI characteristic can do so) causes the rock to ripple and transform, revealing a teleportation portal like the ones the Travellers have already seen.

Stepping through the portal brings the Travellers into another cavern. The air in this cave is hot, but breathable, and smells of metal and chemicals. The cave is bubble-shaped, without any visible exits other than the portal. Huge metallic ribs line the walls and pulse with a dull red light. There is an underlying sense of pressure. Checking instruments reveals that the Travellers are 4,000 kilometres directly below the cave on the surface.

The Ancients cache is crammed with cryptic gadgets and treasures. It reminds the Travellers strongly of the hangar under Vlen Backett's hunting lodge (see *Homecoming*) or Caol's weapons cache in the pocket universe (see *The Death of Grandfather*) but this one has an emphasis on Imperial and Vargr items. There are suits of clothing, travel documents, personal effects and cash (Cr250000 in cash, cheques and treasure). There are also several items of immediate use.

Shimmersuits: There is a set of Ancients shimmersuits, enough for one for each Traveller. These Ancients garments combine the benefits of a high-tech vacc suit and protective armour. Unusually, these shimmersuits are designed for humans, not Droyne, suggesting they were manufactured well after the Final Wars.

Shimmersuits are an all-body covering which get their name from the iridescent sheen of the fabric. They are made from an elastic material that stretches to accommodate a wide range of wearers. Each suit includes a transparent facemask and gloves that link into the suit to form a perfect seal. An oxygen regenerator in the belt provides up to eight hours of oxygen and the suit can resist pressure up to 1,000 atmospheres as well as extremes of radiation.

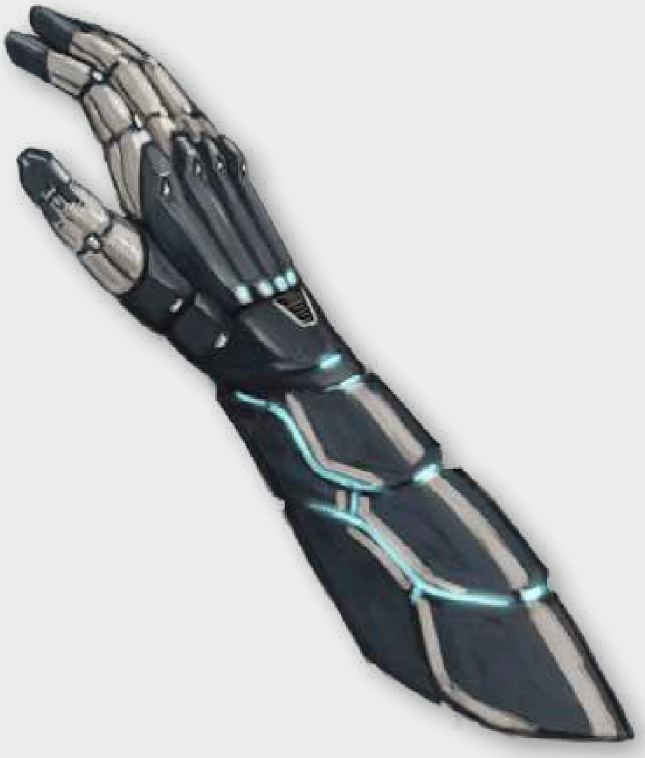
As armour, shimmersuits completely absorb all laser attacks harmlessly, while all other attacks are reduced to ¼ normal damage, rounding down. The wearer of a shimmersuit gains STR +4 and DEX +4.

Disintegrator Gauntlets: There is also a set of metallic bracers that can be worn over a shimmersuit, Ancients weapons called disintegrator gauntlets. There are enough gauntlets for each Traveller.

Disintegrator gauntlets are heavy wristbands that project a field that breaks molecular bonds. They are controlled by gestures and in the hands of an artist can be used to manipulate microscopic objects, perform surgery or make repairs but they can also be used as a weapon.

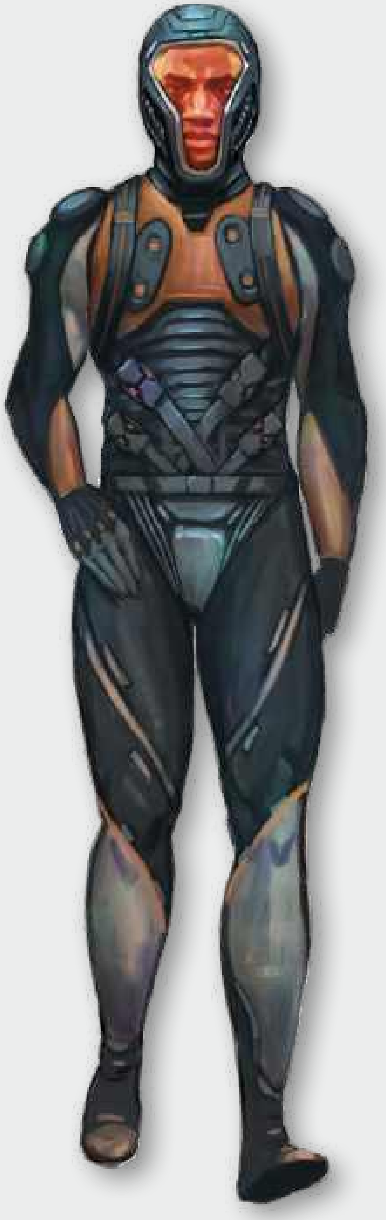
The gauntlets use the Melee (unarmed) or Gun Combat (energy) skills and ignore all armour. They are inexhaustible, as they recharge themselves from energy released by dissolving molecular bonds.

The Artefact: Grandfather's Host is drawn to a large cylindrical apparatus, just small enough to fit through a teleportal. This machine emanates a considerable amount of radiation (not enough to cause immediate damage but a worrying 1D rads per hour. When activated, the artefact projects a holographic interface. Most of the displayed information is incomprehensible to the Travellers; a Very Difficult (12+) Science (planetology) check (INT) lets the Traveller guess that the screens seem to be showing stellar data, describing fusion reactions and gas movement within the heart of the local primary star.



This device is a star trigger. The Darrians discovered this technology approximately 2,000 years ago but the Ancients got there millennia before that. A star trigger alters the nuclear reactions within a star, causing it to flare or even explode. During the Final Wars, the Ancients used star trigger technology as one of their many weapons.

Grandfather's Host feels an all but overwhelming compulsion to bring this artefact back to the ship.



ARMOUR TYPE	PROTECTION	TL	RAD	KG	COST	REQUIRED SKILL
Shimmersuit	Special	25	600	1	—	None

WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	MAGAZINE COST	TRAITS
Disintegrator Gauntlet	25	10m	4D	1	—	—	—	Zero-G

CROSSING OVER

After leaving Pixie and grabbing the contents of the cache, the Travellers can set off in search of the garden world retrieved from Seven's memory.

While Zoe is the Travellers' ultimate destination, they do not know this. Any Traveller with Astrogation 2+ or Science (xenology) 1+, or who checks library data will know something about worlds close to the border. Most of the systems in Uthe near the Regina border are under the control of the 40th Squadron, a relatively organised band of Vargr naval officers who have held those worlds since the First Frontier War 500 years ago. Their current capital is Uthith but they also have a large fleet base at Daeksuzaethukue. The other notable world is Triad, an Imperial client state held as a buffer against the Vargr. Either group would have better planetary data than the Imperium, so Triad, Uthith or Daeksuzaethukue make good initial destinations.

The Travellers need at least a jump-2 ship to get to Uthe. The easiest jump-2 route is from Pixie back to Boughene (passing the gas giant where the whole pocket universe escapade began) and then down to Feri, then onto Beck's World and Kinorb, then Dentus and finally across the border into Pandrin. From Pandrin, they have several options. They can jump along the pirate-haunted 'Triad Corridor' to Triad or else turn spinward and hop along the border visiting Ougzdaelzoerrgh and onto Forrodhkhokh, Daeksuzaethukue and Thaeuevae.

With a jump-3 ship, the mission becomes much easier – the Travellers can just hop across the border to Ougzdaelzoerrgh directly.

There are potential encounters or patrons at many of these worlds.

PIRACY

A copy of Pirates of Drinax is useful for adjudicating piracy attempts. However, Referees can use the following procedure:

1. Both ships detect each other using sensors.
2. The pirate determines whether or not the target is worth attacking.
3. The pirate pursues its target, hoping to intercept the target vessel before it can escape to the safety of the starport or jump space. Most pirate encounters take place between 50 and 100 planetary diameters from a mainworld or around a gas giant.
4. If the pirate gets within range, it uses lasers to worry the target, aiming to disable the ship's weapons and drives, or puncture the fuel tank.
5. Most pirates accept the target's cargo as a suitable prize; it is much easier to fence a few cargo containers of high-value goods than it is to repair and sell a captured ship.
6. If the target refuses to surrender and dump cargo, then the pirate chases the target down and sends over boarding teams via small craft or grappling lines. The boarders storm the target vessel and butcher the crew.

If the Travellers are flying a 100-ton scout ship, they may be able to convince most pirates that they are not worth the bother of hunting down. The success of this tactic depends on where the Travellers are, how desperate the pirates are for booty and how well the Travellers succeed with a Deception or Persuade check.

BECK'S WORLD

The small colony on Beck's World is still rebuilding after the 'landslip' that ruined much of the town near the starport (see *The Hunt*). Travellers with a suitable Profession skill can earn Cr500 x Effect with an Average (8+) Profession check (EDU) roll for a month's work here but the sort of Traveller who pauses on a race to save Charted Space from alien space demons in order to earn a pittance is the sort of Traveller who has played too many computer RPGs.

NO CACHE? NO PROBLEM!

If the Travellers never visit the cache, then Grandfather still needs a star trigger for the final adventure of this campaign. He can build a new machine from scratch using parts obtained on the journey but at the cost of more effort. For most of the journey to the Vargr systems, Grandfather's Host will be busy assembling a strange device in the ship's hold. The device, whatever it is, is connected directly to the ship's jump drive and the manoeuvre drive's grav plates. Grandfather also gives the Travellers a shopping list of high-tech components to pick up at starports along the way.

BOUGHENE

The system's gas giant is under Imperial interdiction while scouts investigate the gas giant, looking for more signs of the Ancients ship and examining the wreckage from the *Alahir*. Effectively, the system is on the verge of being declared an Amber Zone.

Patron: Janter Riles, TAS News Stringer
Payment: Cr10000 and middle passage within three parsecs
Mission: Riles is a reporter for the Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society, here to investigate why the Imperium suddenly has such an interest in an obscure gas giant. His ship, the courier *Kolhber*, is currently waiting in deep space between Boughene and the gas giant, just outside the interdiction zone. He wants the Travellers to help him find out what happened here.
Twist: The Travellers may try to steal Janter's ship. It is an unarmoured courier ship capable of jump-3 travel. The only crew are Janter and his servitor robot, C-543.

DAEKSUZAETHUKUE

Another garden world, Daeksuzaethukue is the domain of Aethgors, one of the most influential leaders in the 40th Squadron. See page 217.

DENTUS

A relatively unremarkable world, home to Hudson Scout Base. Like Kinorb, Dentus's primary economic activity is trade with the Vargr.

The scout base here has more detailed charts of Vargr space than are available commercially. If the Travellers break into the scout base or else use Contacts or Allies to bluff their way in, they can retrieve copies of these charts, allowing them to identify Zoe as their ultimate destination. Zoe is the only world in Uthe that matches all of Grandfather's dreams.

FERI

Feri's locked in a low-intensity civil war between pro- and anti-secessionists and the former faction is winning. The Imperium is covertly supplying weapons to the anti-secessionists; while interfering with the internal government of a member world is against Imperial law, the Imperium wishes to ensure the safety of the scout base in the system, which is a vital early warning station against Vargr attacks.

Patron: Ophus Glim
Payment: 10% of the value of the cargo retrieved
Mission: Ophus is a trader and scam artist in the starport and he has gotten wind of something big. An Imperial transport is coming in, carrying weapons for the pro-Imperial faction. The transport looks like just another far trader but is crammed with illegal weapons. All the Travellers need to do is steal the cargo.
Twist: Ophus' information was right, apart from one tiny detail. The far trader is guarded by a squad of six Imperial Marines in battle dress.

IMPERIAL MARINES

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8 (12)	INT	9	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Electronics (sensors) 1, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Heavy Weapons (man portable) 2, Melee (unarmed) 2, Recon 2, Tactics (military) 1, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	8 (12)	EDU	8	
END	9	SOC	6	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Laser Rifle (5D+3) **Armour:** Battle Dress (+25)

FORRODHKHOKH

A typical Vargr world, Forrodhkhokh has been under the control of the 40th Squadron for generations. The garden world is divided into hundreds of estates, each owned by a single officer from the ships who fly the flag of Forrodhkhokh. A junior officer's family might hold a few square kilometres; a captain rules over a whole nation and if the Squadron Leader is Forrodhkhokh-born, they also hold the title Lord of Forrodhkhokh in addition to their naval rank. The whole planet holds the navy in the highest esteem.

Patron: Engineer Khuegarkhu
Payment: Estates on Forrodhkhokh
Mission: Khuegarkhu was the assistant jump engineer on board the Vargr frigate *Kuezgatho* until there was an accident on board. She was blamed for failing to correctly calibrate the jump drive but is convinced that the refined hydrogen contained impurities. If they have Engineer (j-drive) 3+, she wants the Travellers to serve as expert witnesses and test a sample of the 'refined' hydrogen in their jump drive. If they assist her, she offers them land in her family estates – estates she stands to lose anyway if she loses her rank.
Twist: While the hydrogen is indeed impure, the drives should have been able to handle it. Khuegarkhu was responsible for the accident – but if the Travellers admit this, they will get nothing.

GHISAERSAE

This is a Vargr agricultural colony, with a population of some seven million (65% Vargr, 45% human) scattered thinly over the whole planet; each tiny village is surrounded by hundreds of kilometres of farmland. The planet has invested heavily in Walker Robotics agri-mechs.

There is a corsair base on Ghisaersae, commanded by a Vargr named Nokhu. He rules a pack of three 400-ton Ruguelka corsairs (see page 228) and five 200-ton Rradhi seekers (page 226). He also has a salvaged *Gazelle* close escort hull that he intends to refit as his flagship. Nokhu is a well-established raider; these days, he makes far more money in bribes than he does from stealing cargo and has 'arrangements' with several corporations and trade lines.

The Travellers can pass through Ghisaersae space and refuel at the corsair base or the gas giant (which is guarded by two seekers and a corsair) if they pay Nokhu a tribute of Cr500000. If they refuse, he will order his forces to attack.

KAETS

Kaets is a wild and lawless world, haunted by corsairs from Ueghrrozue and other nearby systems. No government dares claim the space around this world; attacks on shipping are especially common here. As soon as the Travellers jump into this system, they are targeted by two Vargr pirates. One, Captain Vorsang, has a Ruguelka corsair, the *Teeth of Narzabul*, while Captain Reng has two Rradhi seekers. Both pirates are desperate for a prize, so both target the Travellers' ship.

Escape in this situation is tricky – the three ships come from different angles, so there is no clear escape vector towards the jump limit. The Travellers must either engage the enemy ships, bluff the Vargr into fighting each other or use their own advantages (like Ancients technology) to escape.

KINORB

If it were located anywhere else in the sector, Kinorb would have 100 times its population and be mentioned in the same breath as Regina and Rhylanor. It is a beautiful jewel of a garden world, with verdant plains, warm shallow oceans and a distinct lack of hostile native wildlife or pathogens. It is galactic politics, not planetology, that keeps Kinorb from being more influential. The planet is right on the edge of Vargr space and is a primary target in any border conflict.

Kinorb was originally settled to support a naval base (since abandoned) and seeing the beauty of the world, many naval personnel retired or brought their families there. These first settlers knew the planet's precarious situation – evacuation drills and invasion preparedness are ingrained into Kinorbian culture and even a six-year old knows how to field-strip an ACR and find his way to the starport evacuation centre blindfolded. Today, Kinorb is also a key trading post for merchants dealing with the Vargr. There is a distinct social divide between navy families and traders, and between humans and ex-patriate Vargr who make up an underclass of labourers and guards.

Patron: Second Watchman Garik
Payment: Cr20000
Mission: Garik is from one of the navy families and his duty is to keep the planet in readiness for immediate evacuation. He struts like a martinet and is always convinced the Vargr are about to invade. He wants the Travellers to take him to an old naval supply depot that orbits another world in the Kinorb system to retrieve some old surface-to-orbit mini-shuttles left there in mothballs.
Twist: A band of Vargr scavengers found the depot and are looting it. They are harmless teenagers but Garik assumes they are scouts for an invasion force and wants them all shot.

KOUSUESI

This water world is lightly populated; there are no cities or industries on Kousuesi, just a few island communities of elderly Vargr. Vast woven rafts are used to fish the seas and the planet exports cracked hydrogen and compressed foodsticks to 40th Squadron ships.

Landing on Kousuesi is an exercise in frustration for the Travellers. There is nothing of interest on this planet. If they persist in searching for a patron here…

Patron: Trugh
Payment: Cr5/day
Mission: Working on his fishing raft, hauling in lines and beating fish to death with a Vargr fishing mallet. Backbreaking, messy, slimy, salty, perilous work.
Twist: Trugh's a racist Vargr who thinks humans are all dishonest, whining, cheating scum. He sits in a little tent in the middle of the raft and derides the Travellers all day. He has got an eye for embarrassing details and a knack for memorable descriptions.

OUGZDAELZOERRGH

Formerly a relatively minor Vargr world, settled by outcasts and runts, Ougzdaelzoerrgh recently became another Imperial foothold in Uthe. The Vargr of this planet have signed a contract with Oberlindes Shipping Lines, allowing the company to use their world as a supply depot and trading post. A relatively high-tech Class B starport sits in the middle of a coal-powered city.

Patron: Ernst Wegener, Oberlindes Factor
Payment: Cr10000
Mission: Oberlindes Shipping Lines has established a secure compound in the middle of the city, referred to as the Human District by most Vargr. Part of the Oberlindes contract with the government requires them to police the human population and ensure they do not cause problems. Lately, Vargr troublemakers have started causing brawls and riots to discredit Oberlindes and Wegener suspects a competitor is behind it. He wants the Travellers to investigate.
Twist: In fact, the real troublemaker is Wegener's head of security, a Vargr called Kyragh. He believes the best way to secure Oberlindes' hold on the planet is to overthrow the government and intends to keep paying Vargr mercenaries to provoke the situation until Wegener agrees to take the leash off Kyragh's security teams and seize the planet.

PANDRIN

Pandrin is a desert world, divided between human and Vargr. It was originally a human colony but was seized by the Vargr during the Second Frontier War. The two races are largely segregated, with the Vargr having the upper hand.

Patron: Walker Robotics
Payment: MCr1
Mission: A shipment of robots was sent to Daeksuzaethukue but never arrived. Director Kung of Walker Robotics offers a MCr1 bounty for any information that leads to the retrieval of the cargo. He suspects pirates at Ueghrrozue or Kaets stole the cargo.
Twist: The real crime took place much closer to home. Vargr at the starport secretly unloaded the cargo containers and replaced them with scrap metal. The trade ship will limp home in a few weeks, with the crew claiming their cargo was stolen by pirates. They will then ship the stolen cargo to Daeksuzaethukue and sell it on the black market. If the Travellers investigate the Vargr-run starport, they can find witnesses who point them towards the criminals.

THAEUEVAE

In the Imperium, this would be a Red Zone world, an interdicted planet surrounded by warning buoys and system defence boats. There was a Vargr colony on Thaeuvae until recently, when explorers in a deep cavern system became infected with a previous unknown virus. This plague spread through the population incredibly quickly, causing blindness, fevers and even death in many cases. The colony was abandoned.

There is still a naval base in orbit, manned by a skeleton crew. The 40th Squadron intend to reclaim the planet at some point in the future, once their scientists develop a cure for the plague. The virus affects humans, Droyne and Vargr but not Aslan, Hivers, K'Kree or most minor races.

If the Travellers evade the patrols and land on Thaeuevae without taking safety precautions, they risk infection. Travellers on the surface must make an Average (8+) END check every four hours to remain healthy; if the check is failed, the Traveller begins to lose their sight (DM-2 to any vision-based checks) and must make another END check every four hours to avoid taking 1D damage. A Traveller who passes three END checks in a row has successfully fought off the infection and one who receives medical care may add the Effect of the Medic check as a DM.

The Vargr cities on Thaeuevae can be looted for Credits and equipment or the Travellers can complete the mission obtained on Triad here.

TRIAD

This wealthy planet's economy is based on agriculture and Triad has become the breadbasket of Uthe. It is a client state of the Imperium and has the protection of the Imperial Navy. The Imperium originally settled Triad as a warning post against Zhodani or Vargr aggression but many of the current residents of Triad have more loyalty to the Vargr packs than the distant Iridium Throne.

Patron: Bora Doshuss, Human Genetic Engineer
Payment: Cr175000
Mission: Doshuss is a freelance genetic engineer who was hired by one of the massive agri-combines of Triad to research a strange fungal infection. She believes the infection can be fought using samples from an analogous crop species from the world of Thaeuevae. She hires the Travellers to bring her to Thaeuevae and obtain samples from that world.
Twist: Thaeuevae is under interdiction by the 40th Squadron (see page 217).

UEGHRROZUE

The water world of Ueghrrozue is ruled by the granddaughter of its original conqueror. 'Queen' Tsae is a savage autocrat who rules from a floating city on the planet's coppery ocean. The Ueghrrozue fleet is considerably more advanced than many other corsair fleets in the subsector and has been the subject of numerous punitive strikes by the Imperial Navy. Currently, Ueghrrozue is at peace with the Imperium but there are large numbers of 'rogue' corsairs who Queen Tsae claims to have no control over.

The Travellers are approached by a Vargr corsair as soon as they jump into Ueghrrozue, which scans their ship for cargo. The Travellers need to either negotiate with the corsair (under the command of a Captain Rzo) or else flee to the safety of Ueghrrozue's surface where Queen Tsae will be obliged to protect them until the corsair 'leaves'. While on Ueghrrozue, the Travellers are overcharged for everything, their ship searched and any Ancients technology confiscated as contraband.

Patron: Scout Narmos
Payment: Cr50000
Mission: Gruff Narmos is an Imperial emissary and observer, here to ensure that Queen Tsae keeps to her peace treaty with the Imperium and does not engage in piracy. Narmos can help the Travellers retrieve any confiscated goods if they agree to help him. He has growing suspicions that some other power is helping to fund the 40th Squadron and believes it may be the Zhodani. He wants the Travellers to visit the 40th Squadron base at Daeksuzaethukue and snoop around.
Twist: Narmos' suspicions are partially justified – see page 221.

URRILONGONU

This garden world is one of the 40th Squadron's jewels and is heavily defended. If the Travellers jump into this system unescorted, see page 217.

Urrilongonu was once a human colony that was seized by the 40th Squadron. The planet was largely evacuated before the war but still has a strange mix of human and Vargr architecture. The Vargr also retained many of the human laws and customs, so the planet feels like a strange mirror of a typical Imperial world, only with wolves instead of hominids. Many of the Vargr technocrats are fascinated by the Imperium, considering it to be a source of high culture and fashion. Indeed, it is considered a mark of good breeding in some circles to refer to this planet by its human name of Quantar instead of its new Vargr name. The naval officers of the 40th mock the Urrilongonuans as 'hairy monkeys' and 'broken dogs' but Urrilongonu is a vital part of the 40th's civilian economy.

Patron: Dhakya
Payment: Her aid and influence
Mission: Dhakya is a mid-ranking Vargr noble – one of the human traditions retained on Urrilongonu is the custom of using noble titles. She wants the Travellers to accompany her to a fashionable soiree and impress other Vargr with news and gossip from distant Regina. If the Travellers can comport themselves as upper-class Imperial citizens, then Dhakya offers them whatever help she can give them, such as information about the 40th Squadron or local star charts and planetary data.

UTHITH

Uthith is the home of the 40th Squadron. If the Travellers jump into this system unescorted, see page 217.

Uthith is a small desert world, dotted with domed cities and surrounded by shipyards, supply depots and defence satellites. The 40th Squadron may only be a tiny power in the grand scheme of things but a visitor to Uthith could be forgiven for assuming they were something far greater when ships blot out the sun as they pass overhead.

Visitors to Uthith are not especially welcome – the 40th Squadron takes security very seriously. Uthith itself is only Law Level 7 but that applies to the planet itself, not to the space around it. Any approaching ship is intercepted and searched by Vargr defence forces. Those attempting to smuggle forbidden cargoes or spy on the heart of the 40th Squadron are summarily spaced.

Patron: Gulliuvas Hachs
Payment: Cr20000
Mission: Hachs claims to be a wandering free trader trying his luck in the Vargr extents. He asks the Travellers to bring the personal effects of his friend Vadol Moraine on Regina. These effects are harmless souvenirs, holograms and other curios.
Twist: Hachs and Moraine are actually both Zhodani spies. The personal effects are completely innocent but when they agree to the trade, Hacks surreptitiously tries to imprint a telepathic message into one the Travellers' subconscious. He first uses read surface thoughts to scan for telepathic shields, then a specialist form of send thoughts to imprint a message that will eventually be read by Moraine. If Hachs is unlucky enough to try this on Grandfather's Host, then he has a momentary mind-to-mind encounter with the Ancient and is driven instantly insane by information overload.

THE 40TH

Flashback to 500 years ago. The surviving ships of the Ngoerrgh Togzekhz fleet fight their way back to Vargr space in the aftermath of the First Frontier War. There, they carve out their own pocket empire in the midst of Vargr civil war.

The 40th Squadron should have collapsed. They lacked the industrial base or internal coherency to build an empire. In truth, they had help from two factions. The first were the Zhodani, eager to have a semi-stable threat to the Imperium right on the Regina border. The second went unseen by everyone, including the 40th themselves. By mischance or design, the 40th Squadron's petty kingdom was right on Seven's doorstep. For 500 years, his agents have been in the shadows of the 40th; they do not control the empire but lend support when needed in the form of weapons, space parts, technical expertise or intelligence. Thanks to Seven's covert aid, the 40th have been a formidable fighting force despite their comparatively low population and lack of an industrial base. They keep nuisances at bay…

Flashback to several months earlier (see *Descent*). The Travellers have just discovered the Ancients transport ship in the atmosphere of the gas giant Komesh and confronted Seven in orbit. Unable to defeat the Ancient, the transport ship fled into jumpspace and headed for the portal to Grandfather's pocket universe. Using TL25+ sensors, Seven was able to track the transport as it moved through hyperspace and followed it to the portal. As Seven gave chase, he sent a message to his secret base on Zoe. Seven's mechanical hyper-mind, an intellect as keen as Grandfather's but warped by bloodlust and hatred, determined that there was a possibility that the Travellers might escape the transport on board the *Star Hunter*. Seven therefore signalled his followers to be on watch for the Travellers across Charted Space.

And they have found them.

Run this encounter when the Travellers need direction, or when they get close to the 40th Squadron's worlds (or if they need saving from pirates or some other threat). A pair of Leklun corvettes (see page 230), accompanied by a Ruguelka corsair, approach the Travellers' ship and hail them by name. Alternatively, the Travellers can be intercepted while landed at a starport; the two corvettes drop out of the sky and hover above the starport like the incarnate judgement of an angry god.

The corvettes are commanded by an officer named Rrurrkho**.** Read the following to the Travellers:

The lead Vargr corvette contacts you. The image of a silver-furred Vargr female in naval uniform flashes onto your screen. 'I am Commander Rrurrkho of the 40th. By order of Aethgors, you are to cut your engines and stand down! No harm will come to you… if you co-operate fully.'

The three Vargr ships completely outgun the Travellers. Fighting back is not an option. The Travellers can try escaping but the corvettes have Thrust 4 and are carrying Thrust 9 Aakum heavy fighters that can chase down any starship. If the Travellers agree to go peacefully, they are escorted to Daeksuzaethukue.

CAPTAIN RRURRKO

Rrurrko comes on board the Travellers' ship to question them directly, accompanied by a squad of Vargr marines. Unlike many of the other Vargr the Travellers have met in the Uthe subsector, Rrurrko and her crew are utterly professional, with a crisp naval discipline that a first-rate Imperial Navy crew would envy. Rrurrko commands her ship with a quiet charisma; her crew love her and are eager to serve her.

CAPTAIN RRURRKO

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	Female	39

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	9	Admin 1, Astrogation 2, Carouse 1, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (sensors) 1, Engineer (power) 2, Flyer (grav) 1, Gun Combat (energy) 2, Gunnery (turret) 2, Leadership 3, Mechanic 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 2, Recon 2, Tactics (fleet) 2, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	9	EDU	10	
END	7	SOC	9	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Laser Pistol (3D+3, Zero-G) **Armour:** Vacc Suit (+8)

Playing Rrurrko:

- Growl at the back of your throat when speaking.
- Address everything to the loudest or most forthright Traveller, assuming they are in charge because of their higher charisma.

Rrurrko has her orders from Aethgors and will carry them out as best she can. She initially assumes the Travellers are spies or weapons merchants and treats them with respect. If the Travellers are insulting, evasive or violent, then Rrurrko's patience is quickly exhausted and she treats them as prisoners.

Rrurrko can tell the Travellers the following, if they roleplay well and convince her to trust them:

- Aethgors is one of the great leaders of the 40th. His word is law on Daeksuzaethukue and he sits on the council of captains. He has risen far for such a young officer.
- Her task group was not the only set of ships sent out to hunt for the Travellers. Other ships are patrolling planets from Ghin to Torrrerz in search of them.
- Her orders describe the Travellers as they appeared at Komesh. If Travellers have died or been significantly altered since then, her orders do not mention these changes.

The Church of the Chosen Ones: Rrurrko is a devotee of the Vargr religion known as the Church of the Chosen Ones. This sect believes that the Vargr were chosen by the long-vanished Ancients to be their successors. If the Travellers mention the Ancients, she becomes intensely interested and demands to know more. Grandfather will *not* reveal himself in this scene – he suspects that Seven established the Church of the Chosen Ones to gain leverage in Vargr society (after all, it is exactly what Grandfather himself would do and Seven is a clone of Grandfather) and that exposing his presence would be perilous.

FIGHTING BACK

Travellers being Travellers, they may choose to fight back against being taken prisoner by the 40th. A ship-to-ship engagement is suicide; if the Travellers find a more sneaky option, they can evade capture and then continue to search for Zoe while being pursued by Aethgor's forces.

THOSE WHO KNEEL AND THOSE WHO DIE

Daeksuzaethukue is a glowing golden world, a world of forests and savannahs. The only civilisation appears clustered around the starport and hovering over the starport is a huge floating grav-platform, suspended halfway between ground and sky. This is the palace of Aethgors, a prince of the Vargr.

If the Travellers came here independently, then they are spotted by Aethgors' agents at the starport and invited to meet with the leader. If they were brought here by Captain Rrurrko, then she personally escorts them to meet with Aethgors.

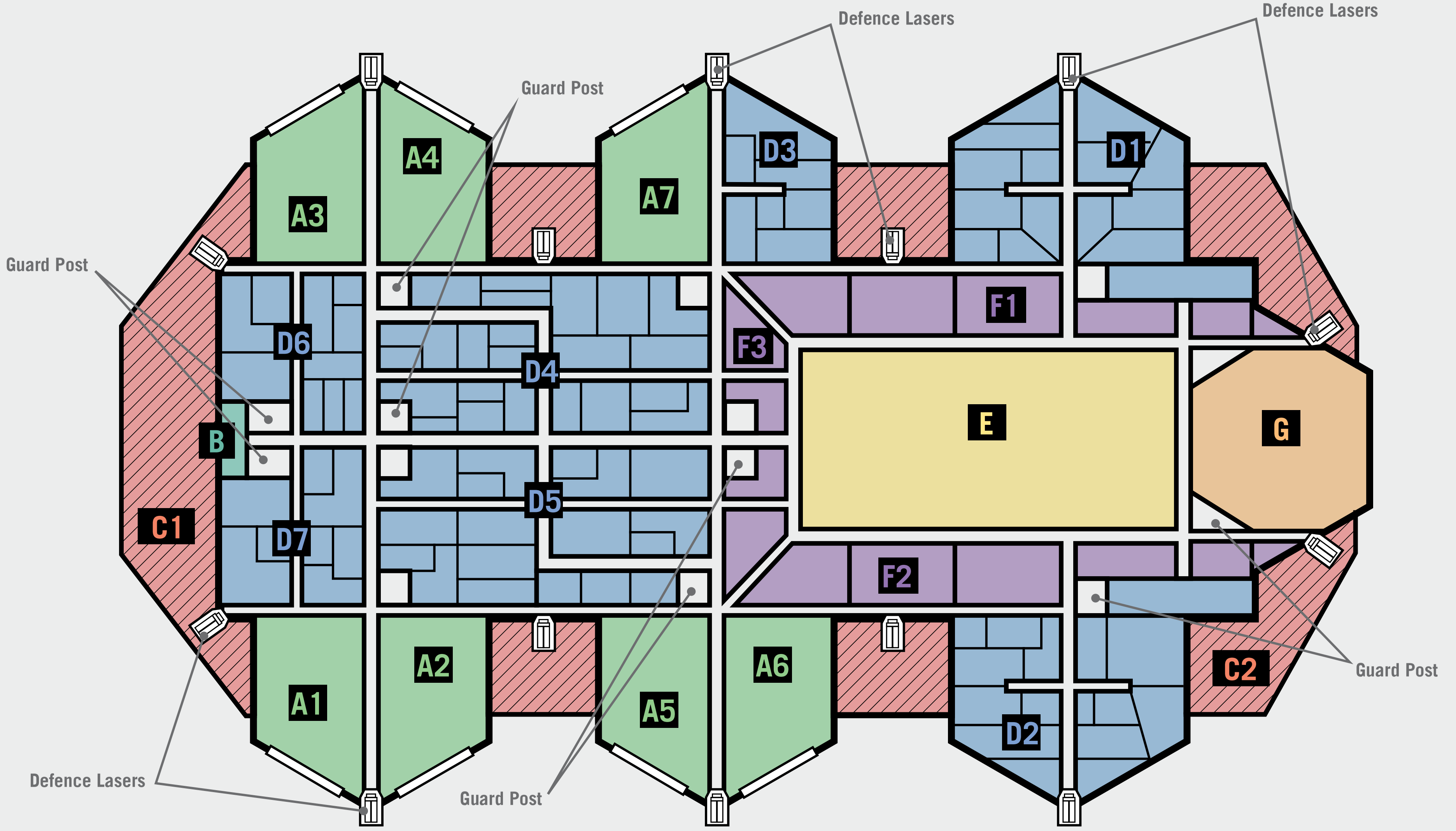
The combat scene to come is extremely dangerous; if the Travellers are not equipped with the shimmersuits from the Ancients cache, you may wish to tone down the weapons carried by the Chosen One priests on page 222.

AETHGOR'S PALACE

The 40th Squadron does not practice inheritance, nor do family connections count heavily. They have no aristocracy and no nobility save the navy. To rise to the rank of leader, one must be a masterful commander and tactician, blooded in a thousand silent engagements amid the stars. Aethgors' palace is half pirate's den, half naval college. There are elements of sybaritic luxury here – looted treasures, dens where you glimpse Vargr curled around strange hookahs or rutting like dogs, banquet tables groaning under the weight of food – but underlying it all there is a steely discipline and devotion to their leader. Any of these Vargr, it becomes obvious, would die in a heartbeat for Aethgors.

1. Docking bays
2. Grav-lift to the surface
3. Gravity lifters
4. Defence lasers
5. Guard posts
6. Apartments
7. Banqueting hall
8. Trophy rooms
9. Aethgor's throne room

AETHGOR'S PALACE


Defence Lasers
Defence Lasers
Guard Post
Guard Post
A4
A3
A7
D3
D1
F1
D6
D4
F3
E
G
B
D5
C1
D7
F2
A1
A2
A5
A6
D2
C2
Guard Post
Defence Lasers
Guard Post

A. Docking bays
B. Grav-lift
C. Gravity lifters
D. Apartments
E. Banqueting Hall
F. Trophy Rooms
G. Aethgor's Throne Room

Read the following to the Travellers:

The guards escort you to Aethgor's throne room. It reflects the dichotomy of the wolf. The room itself looks like something from a Tech Level 2 barbarian's hall, all wooden benches and serving wenches and stone floors before a huge metal throne. However, floating in the air above and around you is a holographic display of neighbouring star systems. Dozens of symbols glimmer, denoting the location of Vargr, Imperial and Zhodani ships, each tagged with a glyph marking how old that data is. From the look of the hologram, the 40th Squadron is very well informed.

AETHGORS

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	Male	42

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	8	INT	11	Admin 2, Advocate 1, Astrogation 2, Athletics (dexterity) 1, Carouse 3, Deception 2, Diplomat 1, Electronics (comms) 3, Electronics (computers) 2, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer 0, Gun Combat (slug) 3, Gunner (turret) 1, Leadership 3, Mechanic 1, Medic 0, Persuade 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 1, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Tactics (naval) 3, Vacc Suit 1
DEX	10	EDU	10	
END	9	SOC	14	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Gauss Rifle (4D, AP 5, Auto 3, Scope) **Armour:** Combat Armour (+13)

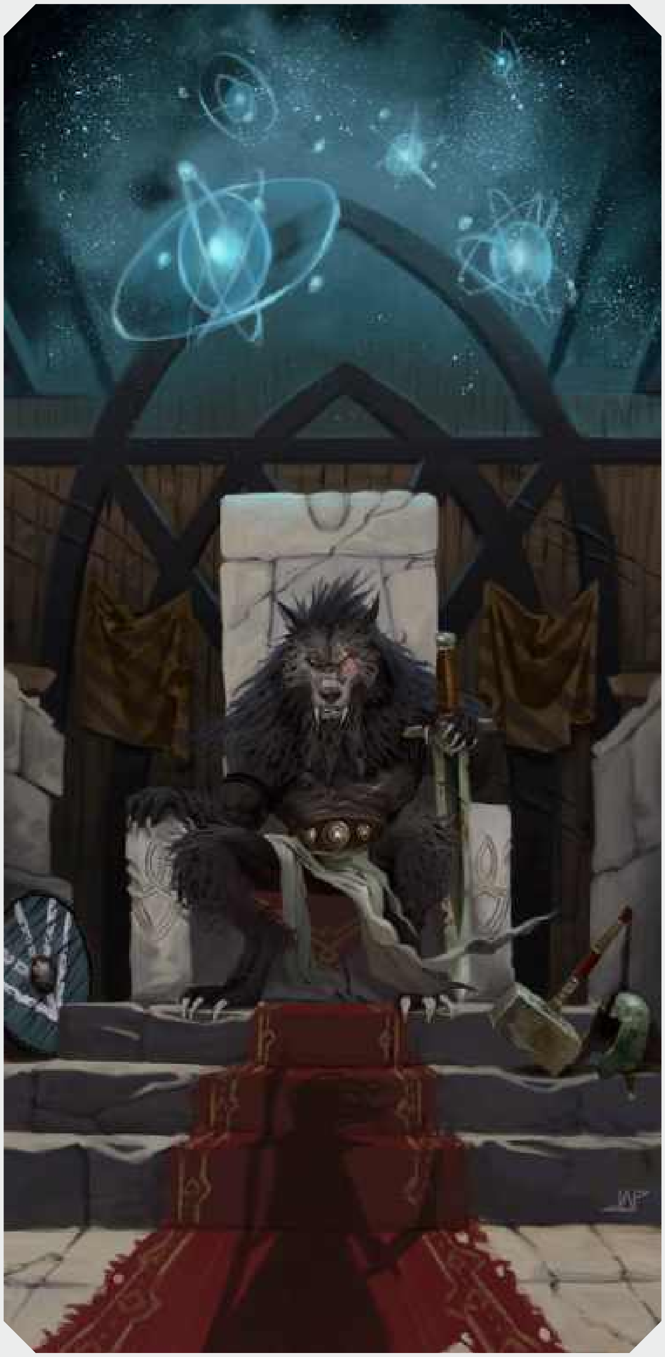
Playing Aethgors:

- Be completely confident and proud.
- Do not walk – stride. Do not sit – instead, perch on a chair or spin it around and straddle it. Do not just talk to the Travellers, look them dead in the eye and hold their gaze. Rule the room.
- Snap orders to your minions but treat the Travellers as equals.

As you enter, Aethgors turns to you. The intensity of his physical presence is like a blow. His eyes burn with conviction and intelligence, reminding you instantly of the primordial Vargr Hunters you encountered in the pocket universe.

He grins, exposing a mouth of needle-sharp fangs. 'So, you are the Chosen Ones of the Chosen Ones, eh? Sit! Eat! Let us talk!'

Aethgors greets the Travellers and bids them to sit and relax. Servants bring in all manner of delicacies and the Travellers are served fine wines and other drinks.



THOSE WHO KNEEL...

Aethgors explains the following to the Travellers:

- The Church of the Chosen Ones is an influential sect amid the worlds of the 40th. The religion has little hold among the navy crews, but is popular among the ground-folk.
- The High Council of Captains was asked by the Church to find the Travellers.
- Aethgors wants to know *why.* He dismisses the Church's claims that the Vargr are the chosen people – if the Ancients really existed and cared about the Vargr, then surely they would be around helping the Vargr race, instead of leaving cryptic clues and scattered artefacts. The gods care nothing for the Vargr or anyone else.

The Vargr is a keen judge of character – and his throne room is wired with high-tech sensor systems and polygraphs imported from offworld. He can determine if the Travellers are lying to him, unless they succeed at a Very Difficult (12+) Deception check (END) or Deception check (INT) to fool the sensors. The best option here is for the Travellers to trust Aethgors and explain the threat of Seven and their search for the world glimpsed in Grandfather's dreams. If they do this, he decides to trust them and brings up a hologram of nearby systems.

Read the following to the Travellers:

Aethgors highlights one garden world four parsecs away. 'This is Zoe' he says, pronouncing the human name as Zhouree. 'Only a few Vargr dwell there. No starport worth a damn. The Squadron never goes there… but I've tracked Church ships coming back from that system. I've always wondered why…'

At this point, the priests arrive – go to the next section.

If they try deception and fail, then Aethgors turns them over to the priests and will not help them afterwards.

... AND THOSE WHO DIE

Read the following to the Travellers:

From outside, you hear a sound halfway between chanting and howling. The doors swing open and a procession of robed Vargr enters. They wear voluminous white robes and some wear elaborate headdresses or what appear to be ceremonial wings.

The leader of the procession steps forward. 'Lord-Captain Aethgors, the Ancients will bless you for your aid in this matter. Strangers, your arrival has been foreseen by our seers and it is foretold that you will be the ones who guide the Vargr people towards apotheosis. Please, accompany me to the Temple of the Chosen Ones, where all secrets will be revealed.'

This is a blatant lie. The priests are here to capture or execute the Travellers. Call for Recon checks (INT). The Traveller who gets the best Effect spots a familiar face among the Vargr, recognising Nvor, a Vargr who they last saw in Grandfather's memory-imprints during the war against the Dyabyuse (see *Secrets of the Ancients*). Nvor must be more than 300,000 years old at this point but it is unmistakably him.

Nvor produces a strange-looking weapon from beneath his robe and takes aim at Grandfather's Host…

WE GO PEACEFULLY WITH THE MURDEROUS CULTISTS

While it is unlikely, it is possible that the Travellers may choose to accompany the Church of the Chosen Ones. If they do so, they are brought to a church in the city below the platform, where they attempt to separate Grandfather's Host from the rest. If the Travellers continue to co-operate, then they are herded onto a corsair bound for Zoe, while Grandfather's Host is injected with a powerful version of fast drug that induces a coma.

Nvor reassures the Travellers, promising them they will be rewarded for bringing 'the Enemy' to Seven. He dismisses any concerns about Seven being trapped in the pocket universe – even if Grandfather's scheme succeeds in destroying Seven's current body, the Ancient will automatically be resurrected by his Family Archives. Seven is a god and gods cannot die.

The Travellers' best hope at this point is to storm the Church's ship and bring Grandfather's Host out of the coma before they reach Zoe. If they still fail to take control of their own fates, then they are brought through the gate to Seven's realm, where they are dissected cell-by-cell and neuron-by-neuron. Their adventure ends in infinite suffering and the triumph of Seven.

EARTH-SHATTERING KABOOMS

Call for initiative. This fight should be a bloody, high-octane affair. The Travellers are likely armed with Ancients disintegrator gauntlets and armoured in shimmersuits; some of their foes have comparable protection. In effect, the Travellers and some of the Chosen One priests are fighting with weapons thousands of years more advanced and hundreds of times more destructive that anything the Vargr possess. This is not a fight where the Travellers can take cover behind walls – this is a fight where the enemy have the firepower to blast the wall to cinders with one shot. There should be no way to avoid collateral damage. Go over the top for this one – crack the grav platform if you can!

- Along with Nvor, there is one Ancients assassin per two Travellers.
- There are another five Church priests who will fight alongside the assassins but are equipped only with TL12 weapons and are not as much of a threat.
- If the Travellers have convinced Aethgors to help them, then he fights alongside them, as do his guards. Otherwise, the guards just try to protect Aethgors and the civilians, and shoot back at anyone else who fires at them.

ESCAPING THE PLATFORM

There are plenty of air crafts and personal flyers docked at the platform that the Travellers can use to escape. If Aethgors is willing to aid them and survives the assassination attempt, then he offers the Travellers the use of his personal corvette. Otherwise, the Travellers need to head back to their own ship and head for orbit.

ONTO ZOE

If the Travellers' ship is still in the custody of the 40th Squadron, then the chaos ensuing from the attack on Aethgors' platform works to their advantage. The Vargr guards are thrown into disarray by the Church of the Chosen One's attack, so the Travellers will have an easier time breaking into the starport and retrieving their ship. Behind them, the city explodes in flames and rioting as the Vargr loyal to Aethgors turn on the church.

Furthermore, 40th Squadron policy is to keep all ships fully fuelled at all times, so their ship has a full tank of refined hydrogen. The Travellers can take off (possibly dodging a few patrols if the Referee wishes to add further challenge) and jump. With a jump-2 ship, the best route is a jump to Otsesu and then onto Zoe.

NVOR

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	Male	Unknown

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	12	INT	10	Deception 3, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Leadership 2, Recon 3, Stealth 4
DEX	14	EDU	12	
END	12	SOC	8	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Ancient Fusion Pistol (8D+8) **Armour:** Shimmersuit (special)

PRIEST

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	9	Gun Combat (energy) 2
DEX	8	EDU	9	
END	6	SOC	7	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Laser Pistol (3D+3, Zero-G) **Armour:** Concealed Tailored Vacc Suit (+8)

ANCIENTS ASSASSIN

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Vargr	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	6	INT	7	Gun Combat (slug) 3, Recon 2, Stealth 2
DEX	8	EDU	9	
END	7	SOC	6	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Gauss Rifle (4D, AP 5, Auto 3, Scope) **Armour:** Concealed Tailored Vacc Suit (+8)

If the Travellers continue to explore the subsector in search of the right garden world, then the only other candidate is Tinkaeghzzaklez.

TINKAEGHZZAKLEZ

The garden world of Tinkaeghzzaklez is controlled by the corsair lords of Aethkaek, who use it as their private hunting ground. The planet is protected by orbital defence satellites that automatically fire without warning on any unfamiliar ships.

If the Travellers contact the corsairs by radio, they may be able to negotiate landing rights with a successful Difficult (10+) Persuade check. If the Travellers visit Tinkaeghzzaklek, they find it to be an insular compound overlooking the wilderness, where the corsair lords treat their servants like slaves. The corsairs monitor traffic through their system; they have spotted several unfamiliar ships refuelling at the gas giant and jumping out towards Zoe.

OTSESU

Otsesu is a low-technology planet used as a supply base and hideout for pirates and inhabited only by a handful of Vargr peasants and exiles. The 'starport' is a field of dirt next to a river. If the Travellers land here, one of the first people they meet is a deranged Vargr prophet, Dzoerzthu, ranting about the impending return of the Ancients who will 'lead the Vargr to dominion over all the stars'. He was dumped here by a crew of corsairs who grew tired of his delusional ramblings. Dzoerzthu identifies one star in the heavens as being the 'fortress of the Ancients'; if the Travellers map this star to their charts with Astrogation, they identify it as Zoe.

FINDING THE GATE

The world of Zoe matches the description given by Grandfather precisely. The world is forested and the atmosphere has a high partial pressure of neon. The system's gas giant has three moons and one is an iceball on a long eccentric orbit that indicates a recent capture.

The planet is officially listed with a population in the thousands – in fact, the population of Zoe consists of several thousand Vargr and several million semi-intelligent sea-slugs, a race called the Rynkatropa. Vargr bands colonised the planet and conquered the Rynkatropa, who at the time had barely reached TL1, in the hopes of turning the slugs into slaves. As it transpired, the Rynkatropa have difficulty surviving beyond the confines of their home and make poor slaves. The Vargr established factories along the shoreline where Rynkatropa slugs toil in what would be sweat-shop conditions, if they had sweat glands, working to produce low-tech bulk goods for the markets of Gzogzu. The factory slugs are kept fed and disease-free, unlike their rural cousins who suffer from epidemics that have reduced their population by almost three-quarters since first contact.

The largest settlement is located at the starport, which consists of a large slab of concrete near the shore. The starport is guarded by a dozen guards armed with rocket launchers. When the Travellers land, they are met by the local 'commandant', Songak, a cruel and arrogant brute who suspects all visitors of being troublemakers out to liberate the slugs or interfere with Zoe's fragile economy. They may also encounter another Vargr, a researcher named Kago, who knows more about the wilderness of the planet than anyone else.

SONGAK

Songak is typical of most Vargr on Zoe; he considers the sea-slugs to be nothing more than intelligent animals and assumes that offworlders are here to either poach his slug-slaves or interfere with his business. He just wants the Travellers gone. He admits, if bribed with a few Credits, that the Church of the Chosen Ones ships visit the planet occasionally – local legend insists the Ancients once dwelled on Zoe but no sign of them was ever found. Sometimes, prospectors and adventurers visit Zoe looking for relics but never find anything. He can sell the Travellers an 'archaeologist's licence' for Cr5000, which he claims is needed to explore Zoe.

Emphasise the extremely parochial outlook of Songak. The Travellers are on the verge of fighting a battle to save the galaxy from monstrous Ancients and the last hurdle they face is a petty Vargr thug who is convinced they are conspiring to interrupt his sea-slug slavery business.

Playing Songak:
- Try to scam the Travellers and never trust them, even for an instant.
- Scowl, growl and threaten the Travellers.
- Chew the inside of your lip while thinking.

KAGO

Kago is a Vargr biologist who is studying the Rynkatropa, specifically their diseases, and believes he can cure the epidemics that have ravaged the population. He claims to care for the sea-slugs but his real interest is purely academic and his experiments rely on exposing sea-slug specimens to all sorts of diseases and toxins so he can gather data on their compromised immune systems.

Kago's laboratory is a floating structure in the middle of the ocean, surrounded by dozens of individual plastic test chambers where diseased sea-slugs suffer. If questioned, he mentions that the sea-slugs have legends about 'gods of the deep' but dismisses them as nonsensical myths.

Playing Kago:
- Be a clinical scientist. State everything without emotion.
- Treat the sea-slugs as idiot children. Claim to care for them but you really have little interest in them.
- Sniff before you speak.

FINDING SEVEN

The starport has no sensors and does not track traffic through the system. Therefore, the Travellers need to find another way to locate Seven's base. The entrance to Seven's lair is located 11,000 metres below the surface of the largest ocean on the planet; finding that entrance is the final challenge in this adventure.

Scanning from Orbit: A Formidable (14+) Electronics (sensors) check (INT) is needed to detect the base's entrance from orbit.

Questioning the Rynkatropa: If the Travellers wish to make contact with the native sea-slugs, they have three options:

- **Breaking into a factory:** The shoreline factories near the starport are guarded by armed Vargr but the Travellers can sneak or fight their way in. The enslaved sea-slugs understand Gvegh (the Vargr language) and have electronic speech synthesisers; if the Travellers agree to free the sea-slugs, they will guide them to the 'dark gate' spoken of in their legends.
- **Rescuing a sea-slug from Kago's laboratory:** Similarly, Kago's test subjects speak Gvegh and have speech synthesisers. They can guide the Travellers to the dark gate. However, if the Travellers try removing sea-slugs from Kago's laboratory, the scientist objects and says that without his experiments, the sea-slugs will go extinct in a few years. No other scientist is working on the problem and his experiments are at a critical juncture. Do the Travellers risk the future of a whole sentient species to accomplish their goals?
- **Finding a wild tribe:** The wild sea-slugs understand a few words of Gvegh but lack the Vargr-built speech synthesisers that allow their enslaved cousins to speak in a comprehensible way (among themselves, the Rynkatropa communicate using modulated water jets and whistles). If the Travellers can make their desires known and can interpret the sea-slug's gestures, the slugs will guide them to the dark gate.

Following the Church: The final option is to lurk in the orbit of Zoe and wait for a Church of the Chosen Ones vessel to jump in. The Travellers observe the ship descend into the planet's atmosphere and dive into the ocean. Sensors then pick up a gravitic anomaly below the surface (as a force shield is projected from deep below to protect the Church ship from the crushing pressure).

A LEAP OF FAITH

Once the Travellers have located the entrance to Seven's realm, they need to get in. The entrance is 11 kilometres below the surface, far beyond the endurance of any starship. Even if the hull was able to resist being crushed, there are all sorts of weaker components (viewports, airlocks, weapon barrels, landing gear and so on) that will likely break under pressure. Just flying down into the trench is not an option.

However, if the Travellers have the shimmersuits, they can just… jump. The suits protect them from practically any pressure possible planetside, no matter how intense. The best way for the Travellers to reach Seven's realm is therefore to jump out of their spaceship, fall through the atmosphere, then sink for 11 kilometres straight down into darkness…

… and the final confrontation.

NO SHIMMERSUITS

If the Travellers never visited the Ancients cache and do not have shimmersuits, then their only way to reach Seven's realm is to use one of the Church of the Chosen One vessels and trick Seven's servants into activating the protective shield.

AAKUM HEAVY FIGHTER

The Aakum is the most common fighter craft used by Vargr military organisations and it appears in many corsair bands. It is fast enough and tough enough to battle other fighters, while carrying enough firepower to assault larger vessels with some effectiveness.

TL14		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	40 tons, Streamlined	—	2.4
	Aerofins	2	0.2
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 12	3.84	2.304
M-Drive	Thrust 9	3.6	7.2
	High Burn Thruster (thrust 6)	4.8	0.96
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 60	4	4
Fuel Tanks	10 weeks of operation, 2 hours high burn	13	—
Bridge		3	0.5
Computer	Computer/20fib	—	7.5
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
	Improved Signal Processing	1	4
Weapons	Firmpoints (pulse laser) x2	0	2.2
	Fixed Mount (PGVP-12 x2)	1	0.042
Software	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Evade/1	—	1
	Fire Control/2	—	4
Cargo		0.76	—

Crew:

Pilot

Hull: 16

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

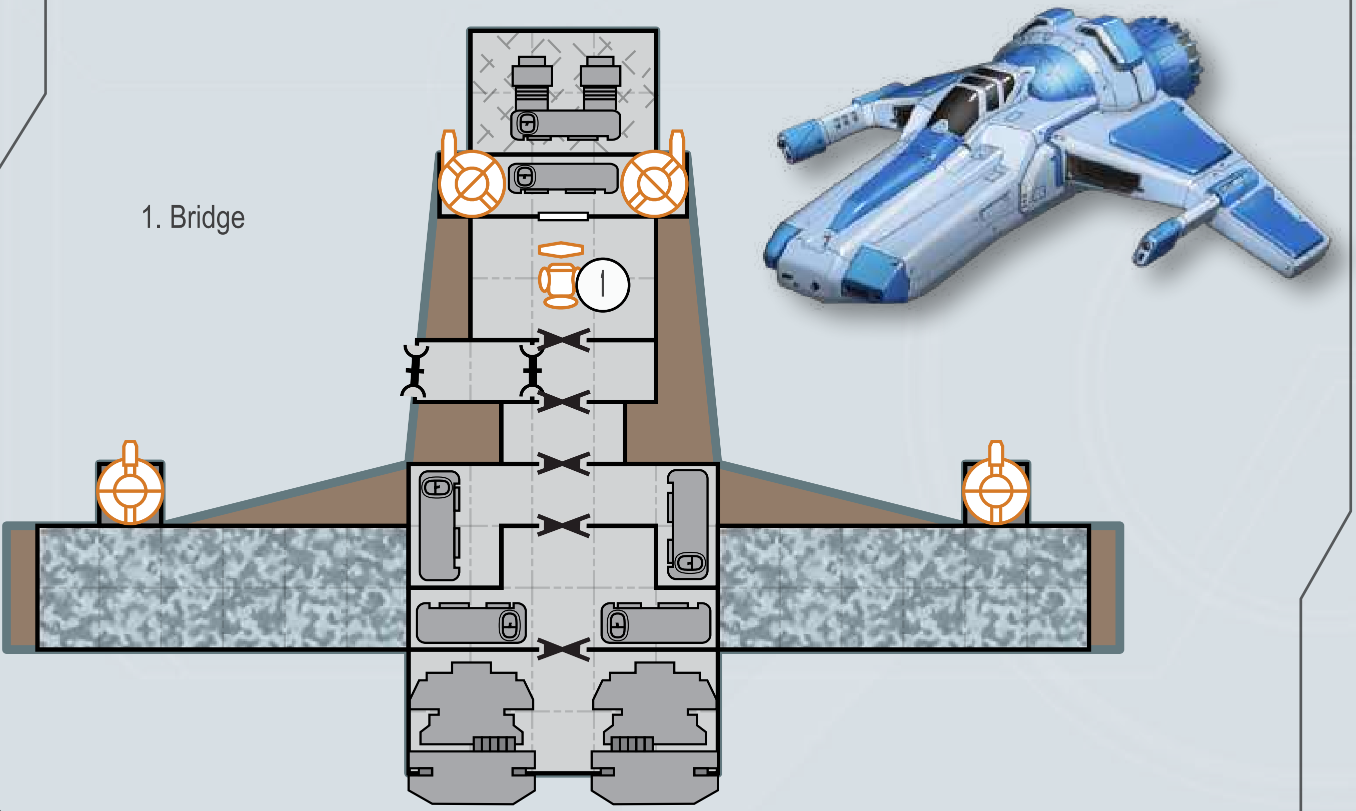
Cr3384/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr40.606

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	8
Manoeuvre Drive	36
Sensors	5
Weapons	8



RRADHI SEEKER

TYPE: N/A

The Rradhi seeker is a versatile ship designed for mining and prospecting. The normal crew consists of a pilot, navigator, engineer and medic, although some multi-skilled prospectors will attempt to fly the ship on their own. Up to four additional workers can join the crew with double occupancy if required, although care has to be taken that this does not reduce profits.

TL10		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	200 tons, Streamlined	—	12
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 2	5	1.2
M-Drive	Thrust 1	2	4
J-Drive	Jump-1	10	15
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 70	7	3.5
Fuel Tanks	J-1, 12 weeks operation	23	—
Bridge		10	1
Computer	Computer/5	—	0.03
Sensors	Civilian Grade	1	3
Weapons	Single Turrets (laser drill) x2	2	0.7
Systems	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processors (20 tons/day)	1	0.05
	Docking space (30 tons)	33	8.25
	Ship's Boat	—	7.272
	Mining Drones (10)	20	2
Software	Jump Control/1	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Fire Control/1	—	2
Staterooms	Standard x4	16	2
Common Areas		12	1.2
Cargo		57	—

Crew:

Pilot, Astrogator, Engineer, Medic

Hull: 80

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr5359/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr64.302

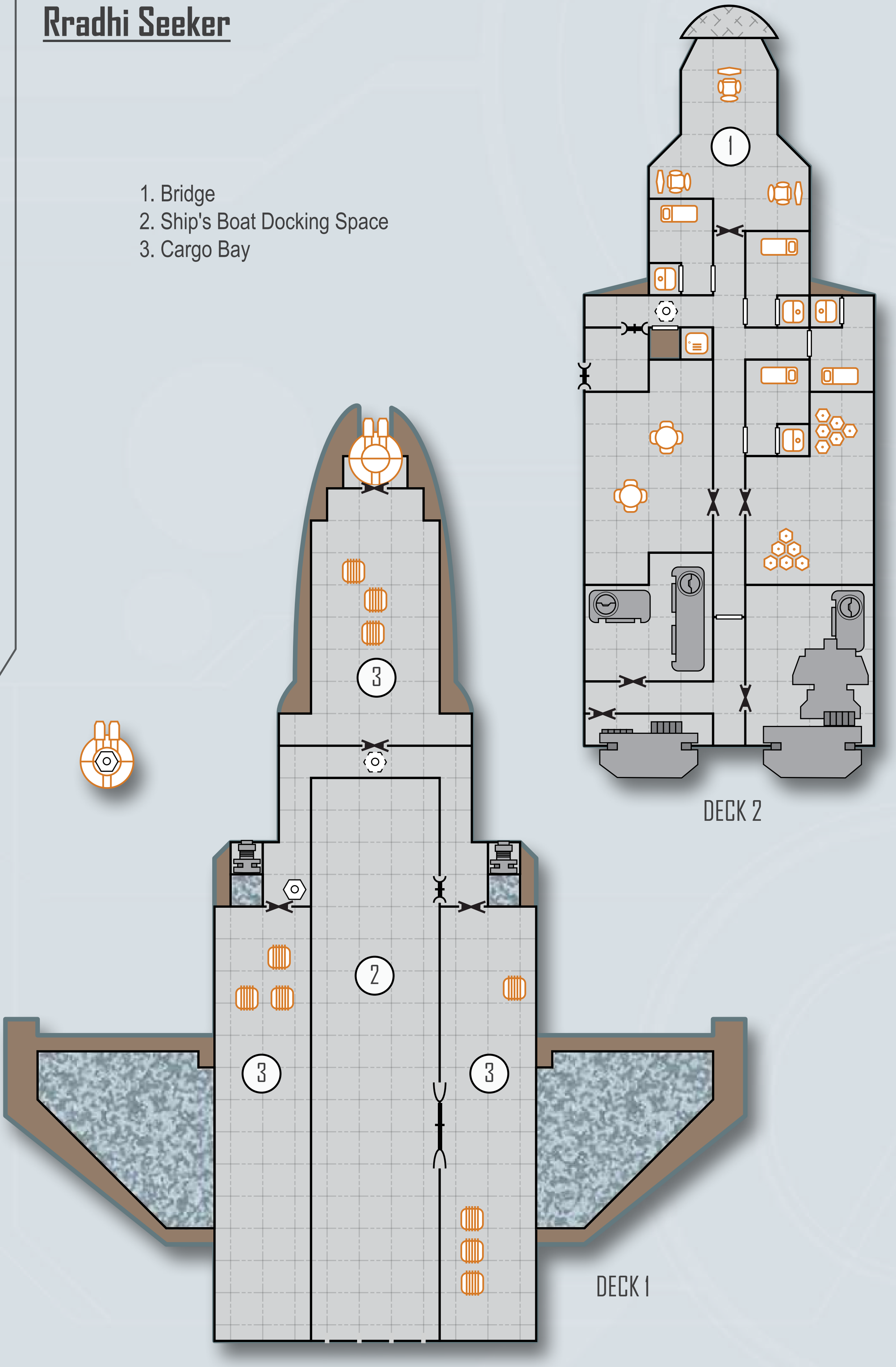
Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	40
Manoeuvre Drive	20
Jump Drive	20
Sensors	1
Weapons	10

Rradhi Seeker

Rradhi Seeker

1. Bridge
2. Ship's Boat Docking Space
3. Cargo Bay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DECK 2
DECK 1

RUGUELKA CORSAIR

TYPE: N/A

Using a small but potent 400-ton hull, the Ruguelka is the raiding vessel of choice for most corsair bands. It is a common sight in Vargr space and one feared by many Travellers. Extremely fast, it is hard to escape from once an intercept course has been set and it can carry a substantial boarding party.

TL12		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	400 tons, Streamlined	—	24
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour: 6	30	7.2
M-Drive	Thrust 5	20	40
J-Drive	Jump-2	25	37.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 390	26	26
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 4 weeks operation plus Modular Cutter	84	—
Bridge		20	2
Computer	Computer/15	—	2
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Triple Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	8
	Triple Turrets (missile racks) x2	2	6.5
Ammunition	Missile Storage (48 missiles)	4	—
Systems	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processors (40 tons/day)	2	0.1
	Docking Space (50 tons)	55	13.75
	Modular Cutter	—	10.287
	Cargo Scoop	2	0.5
	Breaching tube	3	3
	Forced Linkage Apparatus	2	0.1
Software	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Fire Control/2	—	4
Staterooms	Standard x7	7	28
	Low Berths x6	3	0.3
	Barracks x10	20	1
Common Areas		9	0.9
Cargo		61	—

Crew:

Captain, Pilot, Astrogator, Engineer x3, Medic, Gunners x4, Boarders x10

Hull: 160

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr16245/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr194.937

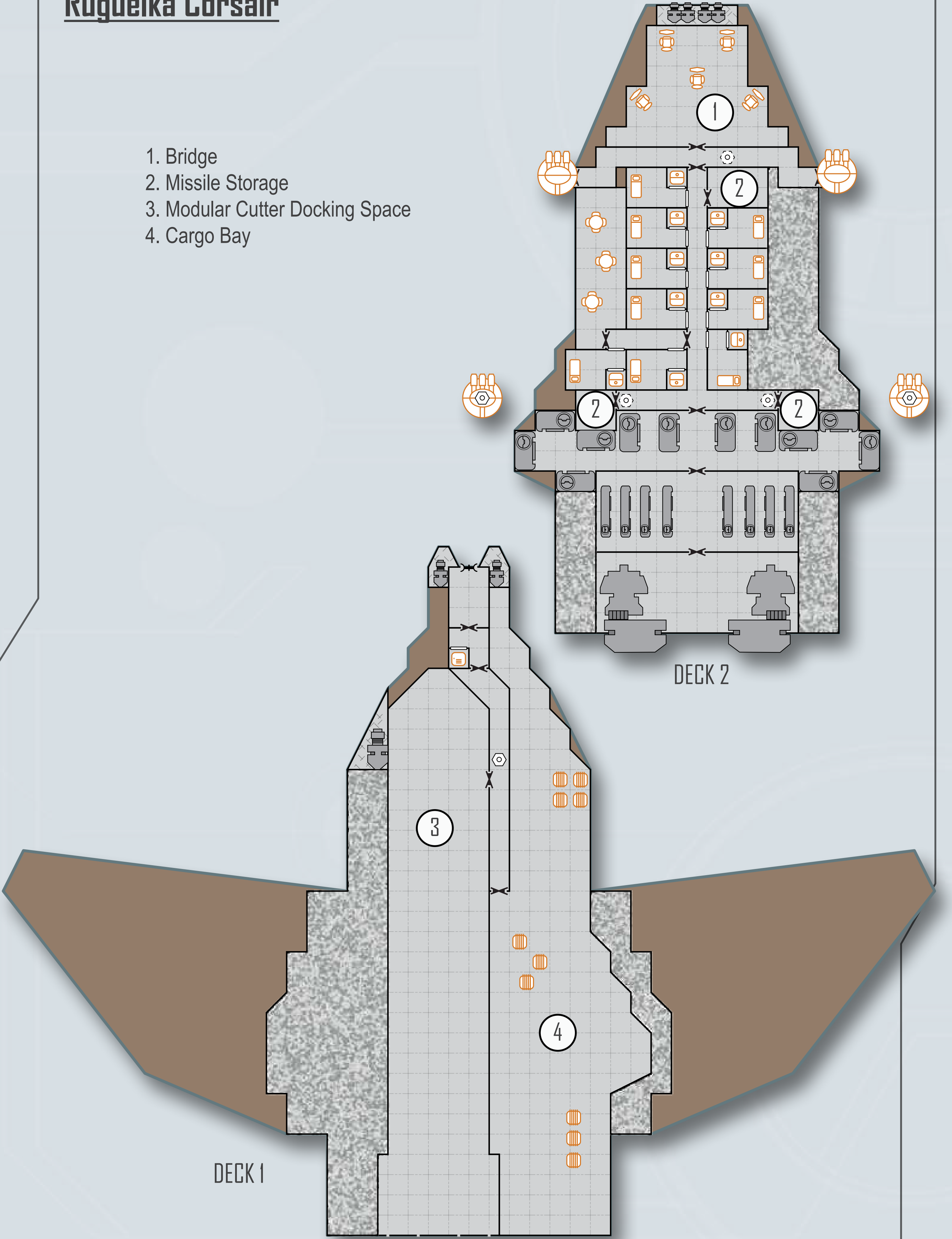
Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems	80
Manoeuvre Drive	200
Jump Drive	80
Sensors	2
Weapons	28

Ruguelka Corsair

Ruguelka Corsair

1. Bridge
2. Missile Storage
3. Modular Cutter Docking Space
4. Cargo Bay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DECK 2
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4
DECK 1

LEKLUN CORVETTE

TYPE: N/A

Using an 800-ton hull, the Leklun is commonly used by Vargr military forces for patrols and fighting corsair raiders. Some variants sacrifice the fighters for a G/Carrier, allowing a larger complement of troops to be deployed in a single action. While the smallest of true warships, the Leklun is nonetheless potent enough against raider vessels and when combined into squadrons, the corvette can cause problems for larger ships.

TL14		TONS	COST (MCr)
Hull	800 tons, Streamlined	—	48
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 8	51.2	30.72
M-Drive	Thrust 4	32	64
J-Drive	Jump-4	85	127.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 900	60	60
Fuel Tanks	J-4, 4 weeks operation plus Heavy Fighters	328	—
Bridge	Holographic Controls	20	5
Computer	Computer/20fib	—	7.5
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
	Enhanced Signal Processing	2	8
	Countermeasures Suite	2	4
Weapons	Triple Turrets (pulse lasers) x6	6	24
	Triple Turrets x2	2	6.5
Systems	Fuel Scoop	—	—
	Fuel Processors (80 tons/day)	4	0.2
	Docking Space (40 tons) x2	88	22
	Aakum Heavy Fighters x2	—	81.612
	Medical Bay	4	2
Software	Jump Control/4	—	0.4
	Library	—	—
	Manoeuvre/0	—	—
	Fire Control/3	—	6
	Evade/2	—	2
Staterooms	Standard x12	48	6
	Emergency Low Berths x3	3	3
	Barracks (12 passengers)	24	1.2
Common Areas		20	2
Cargo		12.8	—

Crew:

Captain, Pilots x3, Astrogator, Engineers x6, Medic, Gunners x8, Marines x12

Hull: 320

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr42961/month

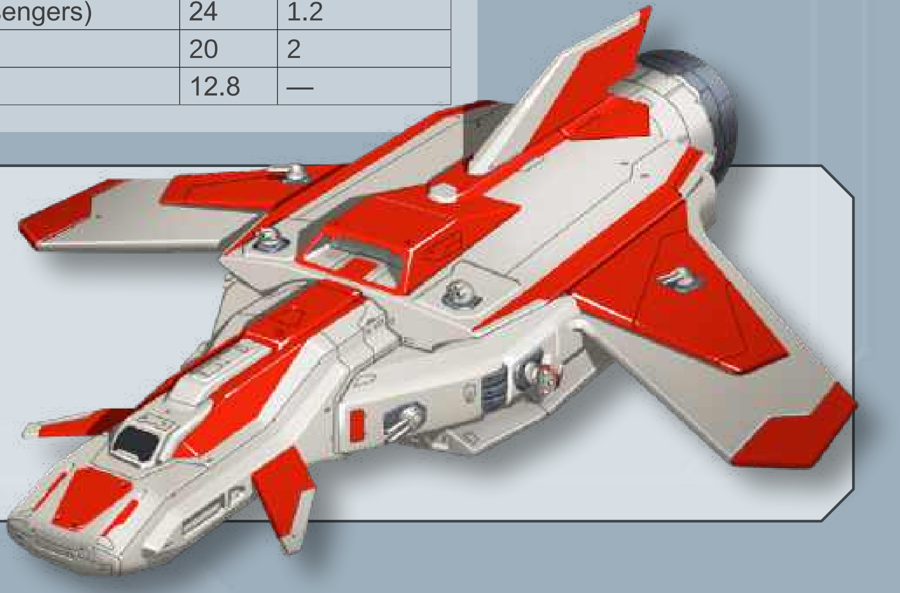
PURCHASE COST

MCr515.532

Power Requirements

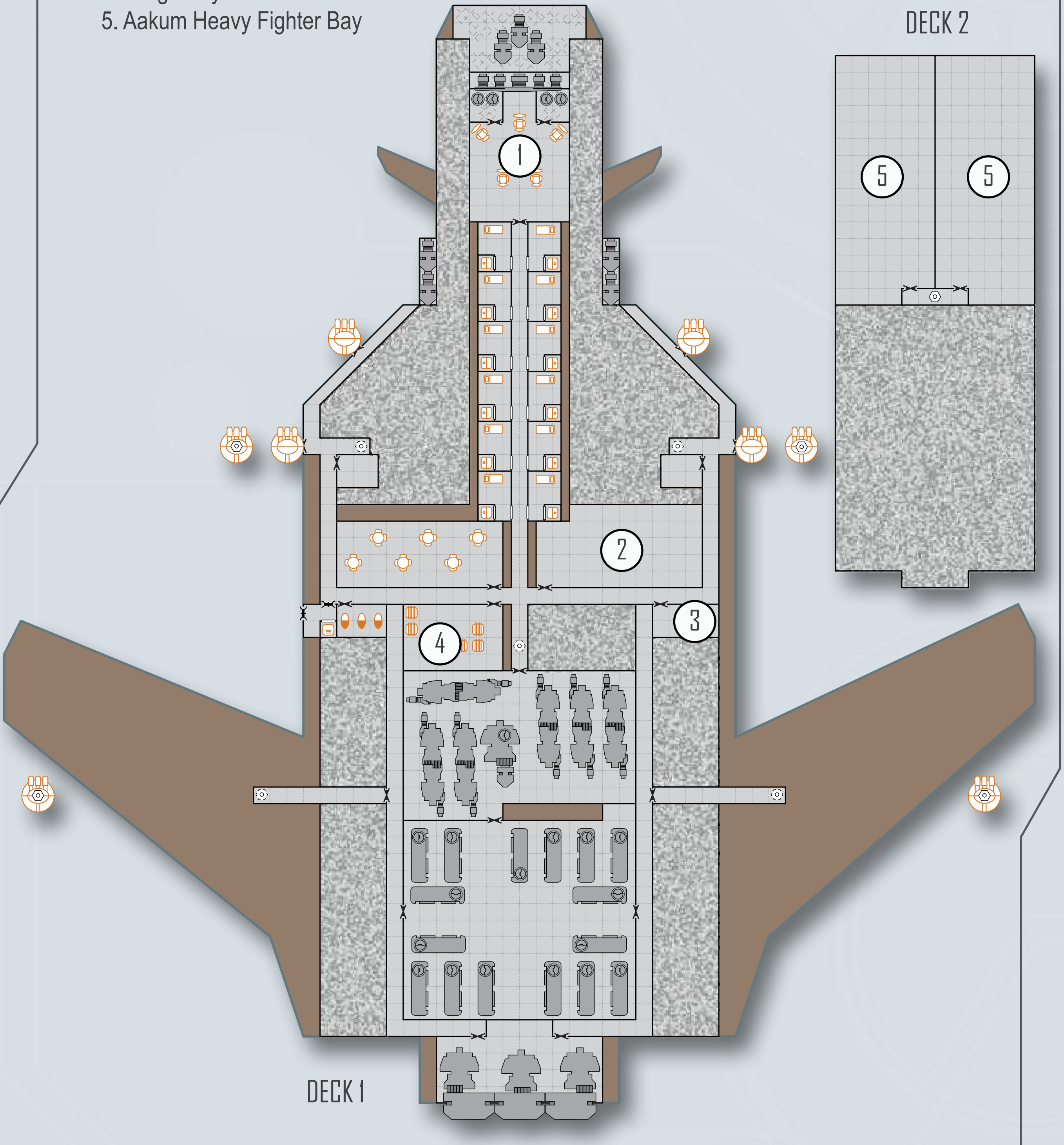
Basic Ship Systems	160
Manoeuvre Drive	320
Jump Drive	320
Sensors	7
Weapons	80

Leklun Covette



Leklun Corvette

1. Bridge
2. Barracks
3. Medical Bay
4. Cargo Bay
5. Aakum Heavy Fighter Bay


DECK 2
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DECK 1

GRANDFATHER LIES

Gilgamesh spoke to Utanapishtim, the Faraway:
'I have been looking at you,
but your appearance is not strange--you are like me!
You yourself are not different--you are like me!
My mind was resolved to fight with you,
but instead my arm lies useless over you.
Tell me, how is it that you stand in the Assembly of the Gods, and have found life!'
Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
'I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,
a secret of the gods I will tell you!'
— The Epic of Gilgamesh

The Travellers dive into the oceans of Zoe and sink into the black depths, protected by their shimmersuits. Deep beneath the waves, they pass through a portal into a vast hidden fortress, located in the very heart of the planet. There, in a nightmare city lit by a dying star, they find Seven's new body being constructed by his Family Archive. Here, the servants of Seven live in the shadows of unimaginable technologies.

They are attacked by Seven's defences soon after they arrive and must make their way across the alien city using stealth, subterfuge or strength of arms. They make to the Family Archive where Grandfather attempts to prevent Seven's resurrection – but he is stunned by a concealed psionic defence mechanism.

The Travellers are captured and interrogated by another instance of Vlen Backett. The Inheritor's uncle puts the case for betraying Grandfather and helping Seven, and the Travellers must choose which Ancient they serve. If they choose to aid Seven, then Grandfather is executed. If they choose Grandfather, they must kill Vlen Backett before returning to the Archive.

Grandfather disables the Archive, ensuring that when the pocket universe collapses, Seven will be permanently erased. He also activates the star trigger to destroy the planet.

GRANDFATHER

Grandfather remains able to take control of his Host Traveller. Most of his mind is occupied with dealing with Seven's defences; there are psionic, hyperspatial, memetic and temporal aspects to this war that the Travellers cannot perceive. While Grandfather is the driving force behind the Travellers' attack on Seven's world, the Travellers should remain in charge for most of the adventure and all the important decisions are up to them.

CANON?

The ending of this adventure is in the hands of exactly who it should be – the Travellers. It is up to them to decide by their actions and their choices, which faction triumphs and which Ancient falls. Future *Traveller* books assume that the Ancients play no further active role in events – either both Ancients are killed or Grandfather wins and then vanishes to another pocket universe to pursue abstruse scientific research.

REFEREE ADVICE

Good luck. This is the big finale of the campaign. At least one Ancient will die today at the hands of your Travellers.

The structure of this section is simple. The Travellers enter Seven's base and find their way to his Family Archive. Grandfather attempts to sabotage the Archive but is knocked unconscious by a hidden defence mechanism. Vlen Backett appears and attempts to persuade the Travellers to switch sides and join Seven but he is interrupted by part two of Grandfather's plan. The star trigger is activated, causing the tiny artificial star in Seven's base to flare wildly. The Travellers fight their way through the ensuing apocalypse and help Grandfather destroy Seven once and for all before escaping.

At least, that is the plan. No adventure survives contact with the Travellers and this one is no different. Adapt to the Travellers' decisions, keep raising the stakes and run the adventure with more emphasis on drama than realism. This is the climax of the whole campaign – do not get bogged down in detail. Go for confrontation, for catharsis, for heroic sacrifices and last minute betrayals.

DEEP DIVE

The entrance to Seven's domain is located in the depths of the ocean. The shimmersuits protect the Travellers from the crushing pressure as they sink down and down, far beyond the reach of sunlight, into the lightless regions. Down past the continental shelf, the abyssal plain and down further still. To avoid detection, the suits switch off all external lights, all radio emissions, all but the most basic life support. The Travellers sink for what seems like days.

INTERROGATING THE CHURCH VARGR

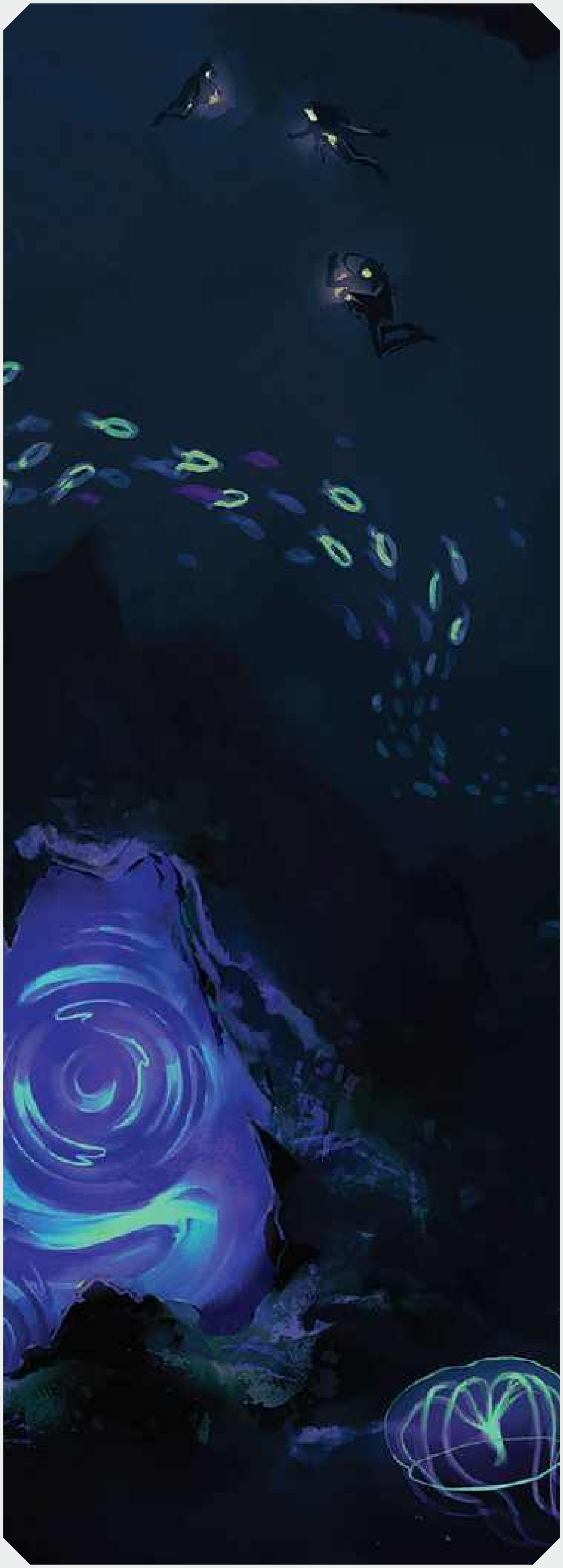
If the Travellers failed to pick up shimmersuits in the previous adventure, then the best route into Seven's secret fortress is to highjack one of the Church of the Chosen Ones transports. The entry shaft can project a protective bubble of force to shield incoming ships from the pressure of the ocean.

The Church of the Chosen Ones has its own enclave of the city; it is the centre of their religion. They have no understanding of the advanced technologies or purpose of the city and believe that, one day, the chosen Vargr will dwell in these cities while their enemies will be enslaved by the gods.

Most of the worshippers are unaugmented, ordinary Vargr, not immortal super-Vargr like Nvor, the agent encountered in Aethgors' throne room. These true believers are fanatically convinced that Seven is a god and they are the chosen race who will inherit the stars. The actual servants of Seven know that the religion is just a convenient social fiction used to manipulate the Vargr population.

If the Travellers interrogate one of the Vargr fanatics, they learn little about the environment within Seven's domain beyond the following:

- The Ancient rules over a great realm where, one day, all chosen purebred Vargr will dwell.
- The realm is lit by the Tamed Star.
- Near the entry port, there is the First City where the Vargr were originally created by the Ancients.
- The faithful are permitted only to enter the outer precinct of the city and must travel along the Road of Stones by foot or by train. Flight is forbidden with the cavern.



Sometimes, they glimpse luminescent natives of Zoe's oceans. There are softly glowing pinkish cubes, shoals of glimmering green dots and dim blue clusters of primordial sea-slugs, distant relatives of the semi-intelligent natives of the planet. At other times, they see the red glow of underwater volcanoes, as black smokers spew out soot. For most of the journey, however, the Travellers are alone with their thoughts as they sink, their only company the high-pitched creaking of their shimmersuit as it adjusts to cope with the pressure.

Eventually, the Travellers see lights flicker below. They are no longer falling through empty ocean but have entered a deep shaft. The sides of the shaft are encrusted with barnacles and mud but the Travellers can see that the walls are made of metal. There are more lights out in the darkness; it is almost impossible to estimate distances underwater but the shaft appears big enough to admit a capital ship.

At the bottom of the shaft is a shimmering energy membrane. Passing through it, the Travellers are spun around in a confusing twist as they enter an artificial gravity field. They find themselves in a huge hangar. It looks quite similar to any other starport hangar, with hydrogen tubes and power lines snaking across the floor and crates of cargo stacked high against the walls. There are two ships docked there, both 200-ton Vargr courier vessels (Avouz couriers, see *Aliens of Charted Space Volume 1*) belonging to the Church of the Chosen Ones.

The starport is empty when the Travellers land.

Exploring the starport, the Travellers find a large teleportal on one wall; the portal is currently inactive and does not respond to any controls or commands. It is remotely controlled from the city. There is also a gravitic levitation train station. It is shut down when the Travellers enter but, a moment later, the walls begin to gently glow and a train glides into the station and lands. If the Travellers step on this train, it automatically whisks them to the city.

THE MISSION

Once the Travellers are out of the water, Grandfather takes possession of his Host and explains his plan to them. The Ancient seems almost amused by the situation. Read the following to the Travellers:

'Somewhere nearby is my errant Son's Family Archive – the machine that will resurrect him when he is destroyed by the collapse of my universe. The transition is mediated by, well, a scientific principle aeons beyond your comprehension but the important point is that it is a virtually instantaneous transfer to ensure continuity of identity. Seven was always a jealous child, unable to cope with the concept of multiplicity of self. There will be a window between the destruction of his current body and the activation of his replacement when he is vulnerable.

'All we need to do is find the Family Archive. Stealth would be preferable, yes? No need to draw Seven's servants on us.

'Your shimmersuits are well-equipped with weapons, should force be necessary.'

Grandfather informs the Travellers that he will withdraw into the mind of his Host, in case Seven has psionic security systems that could detect another Ancient. He will only emerge in an emergency. The Family Archive should be easy to find – just look for the machine near the dormant alien cybernetic monstrosity.

THE WORLD CITY

Outside the hangar, the Travellers find themselves inside an unimaginable vast cavern. The far walls of the cavern are lost in the distance; this one space must take up several percent of the whole volume of the *planet*. You could wrap the land area of a sizeable continent around the inner surface of the cavern. It is illuminated by a guttering, hazy red star that must be less than 1,000 kilometres away. Any Traveller with Science (astronomy) knows that such a star is impossible – either the effective mass of the star is being warped using some bizarre gravitic manipulation, or that star is on the far side of a teleportal device. Either way, the star provides light and heat to this impossible hidden world, like a pocket Dyson sphere. As the Travellers are standing on the *inside* of the sphere, there must be more hidden gravity generators beneath them.

Glimmering all around the inside of the cavern are factories the size of cities and other incomprehensible machines. Automated mines gnaw the planet's bones for raw materials. The planet is being devoured from the inside out to build Seven's fleet of sentient warships.

Near the starport, the Travellers can see an incredible city, a place where building and machine and organic growth are all one. The living-machine structures grow like symmetrical trees, snaking around each other like tree branches. Whole buildings sway and move to catch the ruddy sunlight as the shadow of floating

platforms falls upon them. The whole city, including the floating platforms overhead, is protected by a shimmering force shield.

Hanging far above the city is another, larger floating platform. Skeletal ribs sprout from this platform, surrounding a familiar shape. The Travellers last saw *that* shape as it incinerated Grandfather's original body in the pocket universe. It is Seven's replacement ship/body being reconstructed. The Family Archive must be nearby.

A rough road leads to the city from the starport; alternatively, the Travellers can take the grav-train.

OVERVIEW

The City was constructed – or, more accurately, is constructing itself – using TL25 technology. The buildings are alive and intelligent. Within each structure, the rooms move and reconfigure themselves as necessary to meet the needs of their inhabitants. There are teleportals linking different locations in the city and each structure is capable of providing life support for its inhabitants.

The City is mostly empty – it could hold millions but the current population is only a few hundred thousand. Seven is a jealous and cruel god, who tolerates only a handful of agents like Vlen Backett. The City exists as a promise to the future. One day, when he rules the galaxy, Seven will need more agents and they will dwell in the City that is to come. This whole base will become a capital of Seven's galactic empire.

It is divided into five sections. The area closest to the road and grav-lev station is referred to as the Quarter of the Chosen, inhabited by Vargr priests and fanatics of the Church of the Chosen Ones. These priests are permitted to visit the City to reinforce their faith. They see it as heaven and this is not a wholly inaccurate perception. The City is an incredible wonderland; there is no suffering here, no privation, no disease. Aged priests can be restored to youth here, sick priests can be healed, even the dead can be resurrected. The population of this quarter are almost entirely Vargr.

The central area of the City is the Public Quarter. There are large open squares and marketplaces here, parks, theatres and civic arenas. There are museums where the history of the Ancients is depicted through media such as hard-light holograms or direct memory engram transfer; zoos where there are genetic archives of billions of different species on file and machines that fast-grow clones of whatever animal or plant you desire; psionic zones where even non-psions gain the power of telepathy and can converse or merge with other minds.

THE DIRECT APPROACH

If the Travellers try flying to the city or the Family Archive (using grav belts, vehicles or by blasting a hole in the wall of the starport and stealing a ship), then they run into the city's automated defences. A disintegrator beam sweeps the skies over the city, blasting any flying targets into dust. There is no way to dodge the beam. If the Travellers are in a vehicle, it crashes near the city.

Skip onto Welcoming Committee on page 239 to resolve the City's reactions to intruders.

Most of the City is part of the Droyne District. Hundreds of thousands of Droyne live under Seven's aegis. These are the Ancient's followers who have remained loyal to him since the Wars of the Ancients. Most of these Droyne are virtually immortal and heavily modified to better serve their leader. They no longer caste as they once did – the only Leader permitted is Seven and machines fulfil all tasks of Workers, so all the rest are Technicians, Warriors and Sports. The Travellers may not even recognise some of these creatures as Droyne, because of their radical augmentation.

Near the Public Quarter is the Quarter of the Heroes, as the Vargr priests call it. The immortal residents of the City just call it home and this is where Seven's servants like Nvor or Vlen Backett live. Seven has around 100 such agents. Most of these agents are Human or Vargr but representatives from every major race and many minor races can also be found here. Only a handful of these agents are abroad in the galaxy at any time. They go out and search for signs of other Ancients – Seven believes that the only threat to his ultimate victory comes from his siblings and nephews, so he is determined to scour the galaxy for any survivors of the Final Wars. To maintain secrecy and security, each agent travels the galaxy for only a few decades before returning to Zoe and lying low for a century or two.

Finally, above the city are the Floating Platforms, accessible only via teleportal or flight. Flying is permitted within the city for Droyne.

NAVIGATING THE CITY

The Travellers can initially move freely through the Quarter of the Chosen – the Vargr priests assume they are heroes and treat them with the utmost deference. If the Travellers reveal they are not servants of Seven or otherwise alert the Vargr to their presence, then this treatment will end. In other sections of the City, they have to be more circumspect – call for Deception checks (SOC) or Stealth checks (INT), depending on whether the Travellers are trying to blend in or sneak about. The difficulty for this check varies depending on where they are, as show on the Navigation table.

UTOPIA IN CHAINS

For the final confrontation with Vlen Backett to work, it is important that the Referee present the City as a genuinely wonderful place. This is not some hellish nightmare city ruled by an evil god. Seven may be a tyrant but this City is the best gilded cage in the galaxy. This is a place where the residents have access to all the benefits of TL25+ technology. They are immortal, fulfilled, joyous. Perfected.

All they had to do was give up their freedom.

	Blending in (Deception)	Sneaking around (Stealth)
Quarter of the Chosen	Difficult (10+)	Average (8+)
Public Quarter	Average (8+)	Difficult (10+)
Droyne Zone	Very Difficult (12+)	Difficult (10+)
Quarter of Heroes	Formidable (14+)	Average (8+)
Floating Platforms	Formidable (14+)	Very Difficult (12+)

Increase the difficulty by one step if the City is alerted to the threat of intruders by the Travellers' actions. If a check is failed, see Welcoming Committee Reactions, on page 239.

ENCOUNTERS

Choose encounters from the list below as the Travellers explore the City.

Quarter of the Chosen

- A pack of young priests follow one of the Travellers, trying to touch the hem of their garment and asking for their blessing and insight. They beg for wisdom and charisma to be bestowed upon them.
- A Vargr noble that the Church wishes to recruit is brought into the City, so she may look upon heaven with her own eyes and see the truth of the Church's teachings.
- The Travellers come upon a Vargr preaching the genetic destiny of the Vargr race, how they will be exalted and given dominion over all other sophonts.
- A pair of Vargr talking about the other districts of the City and how they are not permitted to go beyond the Chosen's Quarter until they are found worthy.
- A pilgrimage of Vargr is preparing to leave the City and return to the starport; the building they were staying in reabsorbs their quarters and reconfigures itself for a new purpose.
- One of the buildings reconfigures itself to grow a teleportal; the portal shimmers and a Droyne flies out. The portal shuts immediately afterwards. The Travellers overhear a pair of Vargr talking about the portals; they can only be used by residents of the City, who are implanted with control chips.

Public Quarter

- A trio of Droyne discuss the lack of news about Seven. One is deeply troubled and chirps that Yaskoydray may have defeated Seven. The other two chide him for his lack of faith and point out that the master will be reborn from his Family Archive. Even if Yaskoydray managed to destroy Seven's physical form, the master will soon return.
- The Travellers pass through a psionic zone. All need to make Telepathy check (PSI) to shield their thoughts. Travellers without PSI may use INT instead but suffer DM-3 due to their lack of Telepathy. If a Traveller succeeds with Effect 2+, they can read the minds of the residents nearby. If a Traveller fails, they broadcast their current thoughts to everyone around. Ask the Travellers what they are thinking about right now – this may give the Travellers away to the City's residents.

- The Travellers find a glowing blue spire that is a monument to Seven's plans. It communicates a vision to them telepathically – the Travellers see a whole galaxy united under Seven's rule. Every world, every sophont united in a single purpose. No waste, no deviation, no weakness – an invincible monoculture that cannot be turned against itself and annihilates enemies with a total combined effort.
- A group of Droyne watch a presentation by one of Seven's agents, a human recently returned from Capital. This agent has information about affairs at the Imperial Court and has access to the highest security clearances. Seven has influence at the very heart of the Imperium.
- The Travellers spot a Hiver debating with a Droyne about Seven's next action. The Hiver believes that Yaskoydray is the last remaining Ancient and that with Grandfather's annihilation, the time has come for Seven to move openly. It proposes a series of subtle manipulations to set the Imperium, Zhodani and Aslan at each other's throats, to make them vulnerable in anticipation of the time when Seven makes his move. The Droyne counsels caution – there were occasions in the past when it was believed all other Ancients were gone, until Seven's agents found signs that there were still other Sons out there. Seven cannot act openly until all others are dead. If revealed that he was still alive, he would give advantage to another hidden Ancient.
- The Travellers come upon a stasis field containing a dormant Dyapyuse (see page 147), a trophy from the war against that hegemonising swarm. The alien is trapped in a stasis field that freezes it in time. If freed, it attacks everyone nearby, which could be a useful distraction.

Droyne Zone

- The Travellers pass a medical facility. There are clone-tanks where new Droyne bodies are grown to replace worn-out ones. In another section, a Droyne's brain is surgically removed from its body, scanned and the mind uploaded to one of the warships under construction elsewhere in the base. A successful Recon check (INT) notices that newly-cloned bodies are implanted with cybernetic augmentations, including a control chip for the City's teleportals.
- One of the buildings grows a face (or extends a psionic field) and courteously points out that the Travellers are entering the Droyne Zone – as humans rarely visit this section of the City, their presence is a curiosity. Can the building help them find a particular Droyne or otherwise be of assistance?
- A swarm of Droyne swoop down and interrogate the Travellers, assuming they are new recruits to Seven's cause. They ask about the Travellers' skills and backgrounds. If the Travellers fail to give convincing answers, the Droyne raise the alarm.
- The Travellers find a group of Droyne studying a map of the Ancients empire before it fell. Several major Ancients sites within the Charted Space, like Shinothy, Zdent and the rosette at Tireen are highlighted, as are several previously unknown Ancients sites.

Quarter of Heroes

- Wandering down a narrow alleyway between two strangely swollen buildings, the Travellers find a 200-ton Vargr trader (see the Koerae trader in *Aliens of Charted Space Volume 1*) on a landing pad. There is no way for the ship to take off, as the buildings block any flight vector. The Travellers will need to convince the buildings to move if they plan to use the ship.
- The Travellers encounter a pair of Aslan, a male named Ehyao and a female called Sariah, making preparations to leave the Quarter and return to the Hierate. Both these Aslan are heavily augmented and have been in Seven's service for hundreds of years. However, they are not familiar with all of Seven's agents, so the Travellers may be able to bluff their way past.
- The Travellers find a large hall containing holographic displays of local sectors. Touching a world brings up information about that planet; the user can even zoom in to view individual cities, or individual buildings, and again information pops up about those sites. Another control displays webs of contacts, trade routes, tactical data about a planet's defence systems and fleets, secrets about that planet's nobility and so on – this hall is a treasure trove of data for any prospective invader.
- The Travellers spot a bizarre sight up ahead. In the midst of the living City there is a small patch of forest and in the middle of the forest there is, unmistakably, Vlen Backett's hunting lodge on Alell (see Homecoming). This structure is a perfect replica of the lodge and will show up again in Reunion (see page 54). For now, the lodge is unoccupied.

Floating Platforms: See Getting to the Floating Platforms, on page 241.

WELCOMING COMMITTEE

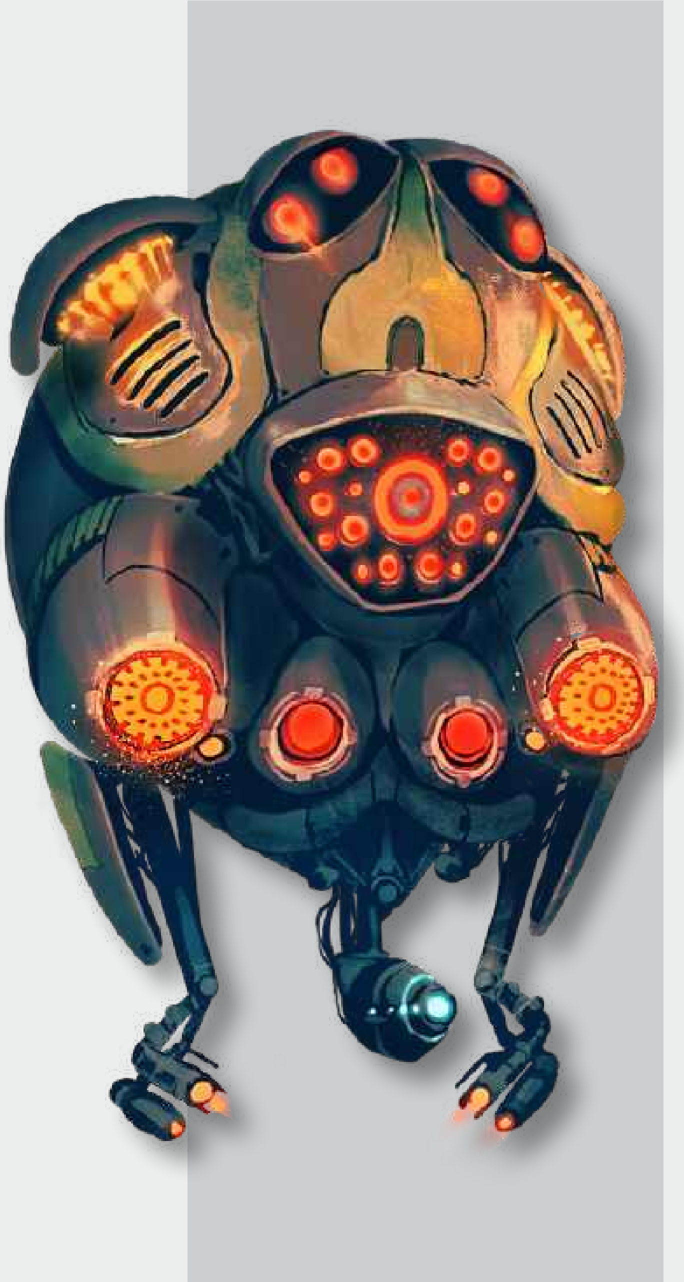
While the Travellers may be able to conceal themselves for a while, they will almost certainly trip an alarm at some point during their exploration of the City. Either go through the following reactions on the part of the City in order, or skip to the most appropriate depending on circumstances. If the Travellers start fighting back or otherwise fail to give satisfactory responses to allay suspicion, then move onto greater and greater threats.

Moving Buildings: The buildings around the Travellers move to block off any exits. Streets close and corridors vanish as the living structures exude new walls to contain the suspects. One of the buildings then constructs a face to speak with the Travellers, asking them to account for their suspicious actions.

The buildings are incapable of attacking directly and the Travellers can use their disintegrator gauntlets to blow holes in the buildings.

Automated Security: The City keeps order when necessary using automated security drones. These robots are intended to deal with troublesome Vargr petitioners and are not a significant threat to shimmersuit-armoured Travellers.

Droyne Strike Team: If the drones are unable to deal with the problem, the City automatically alerts a group of armed Droyne. The Droyne fly across the City and attack the Travellers from above. Initially, they threaten the Travellers with fusion pistols that are largely ineffective against the shimmersuits; once it becomes clear that these weapons are useless, they switch to mesonic weapons.



Robot	Hits	Locomotion	Speed	TL	Cost
Security Drone	16	Grav	9m	25+	Priceless
Skills	Gun Combat (energy) 2, Recon 3				
Attacks	Ancient Plasma Rifle (16D)				
Manipulators	None				
Endurance	Unlimited				
Traits	Armour (+20), Flyer (idle), Heightened Senses, IR/UV Vision, Small (-1)				
Programming	Advanced (INT 9)				
Options	Auditory Sensor (broad spectrum), Drone Interface, Fire Control System (improved), PRIS Sensor, Recon Sensor (advanced), Transceiver 500km (advanced), Voder Speaker, Vacuum Environment Protection, Weapon Mount (medium), Wireless Data Link				

Lockdown: If the Droyne are unable to disable the Travellers, then the City attempts to restrain them until the heavy strike team can be mobilised. The buildings link with each other and try to encase the Travellers in a dome of solid material. The ground beneath them softens into a sticky morass of epoxy and they need to make STR or DEX checks to keep moving; the difficulty for these checks starts at Average (8+) and increases by one step each round until the Travellers are trapped or escape.

Heavy Strike Team: The City's ultimate recourse to a group of intruders is to deploy a heavy strike team consisting of one assassin drone per Traveller, accompanied by a scourge machine (see page 172 in *The Death of Grandfather*). These drones are equipped with a mix of disintegrator weapons and antimatter cannons, both of which the shimmersuits provide some protection against.

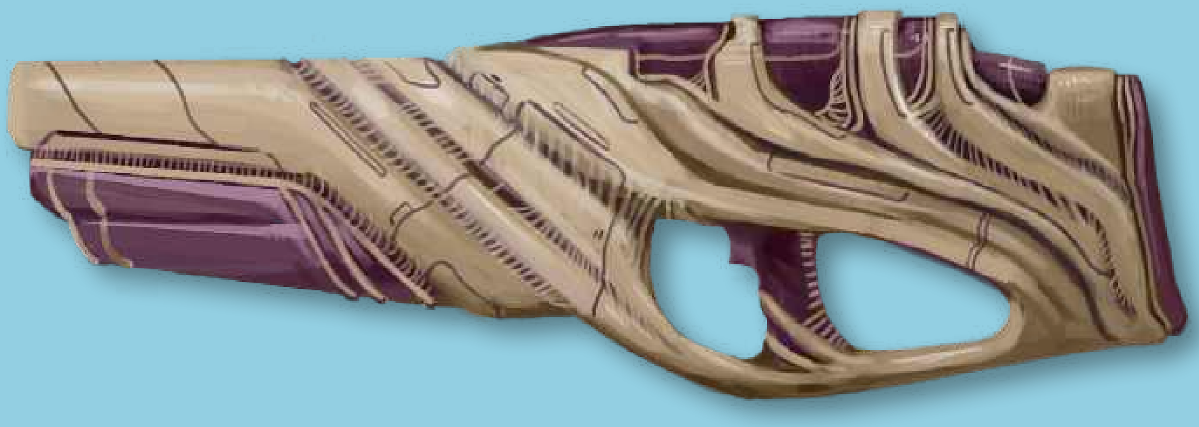
DROYNE STRIKE TEAM

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Droyne	N/A	N/A

TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	9	INT	9	Gun Combat (energy) 4
DEX	11	EDU	9	
END	8	SOC	7	
EQUIPMENT				**Weapons:** Fusion Pistol (8D+8), Mesonic Rifle (6D) **Armour:** Ancients Light Armour (+18)

MESONIC RIFLES

The mesonic rifle is an Ancients weapon, designed to be more precise and less devastating than a disintegrator, firing a small packet of quick-decaying mesons at the target. The mesons only interact with matter when they decay and the gun automatically calibrates the mesons' energy so they decay within the target's armour. In effect, the meson gun bypasses all defences except meson screens and black globes. A mesonic rifle inflicts 1D to 6D damage per shot, at the choice of the user. It ignores armour and even shimmersuits cannot protect completely against it – a shimmersuit will only halve the damage from a meson weapon.



WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	POWER PACK COST	TRAITS
Mesonic Rife	25	300m	1D-6D	2	—	—	—	AP Special, Scope, Zero-G

GETTING TO THE FLOATING PLATFORMS

The ultimate goal of the Travellers is to reach the floating platforms over the city. There are several ways to reach these platforms and the Family Archive.

- **Teleportals:** The easiest way to get up is via the teleportal network. The teleportals can only be activated by a resident of the City who possesses a control implant. The Travellers can bypass this security measure by:
    - Convincing a resident to activate the portal for them.
    - Sneaking into a portal after a resident.
    - Forcing a resident to activate the portal.
    - Obtaining a control implant via the medical facility in the Droyne Zone or by killing a resident.
- **Flight:** While flying is banned outside the City, the Travellers might be able to convince the Droyne to fly them up within the City or else fly up under their own power.
- **Stealing a ship:** There are various ships and vehicles in the City that can be highjacked. The best method of getting around the City is via teleporter but there are vehicles for various purposes, like entertainment, construction or hauling cargo.
- **Climbing Buildings:** The buildings are capable of extending themselves to a great height or extruding bridges or spires that connect to the floating platforms. The Travellers will need to create a need for a building to grow taller or override its internal control systems.

Once the Travellers reach the Floating Platforms, they can jump from platform-to-platform. Some platforms contain gun emplacements but most are automated factories and assemblers used to create parts for Seven's new body. The largest Floating Platform contains the Family Archive. Grandfather's Host intuitively knows this is the one they should make for.

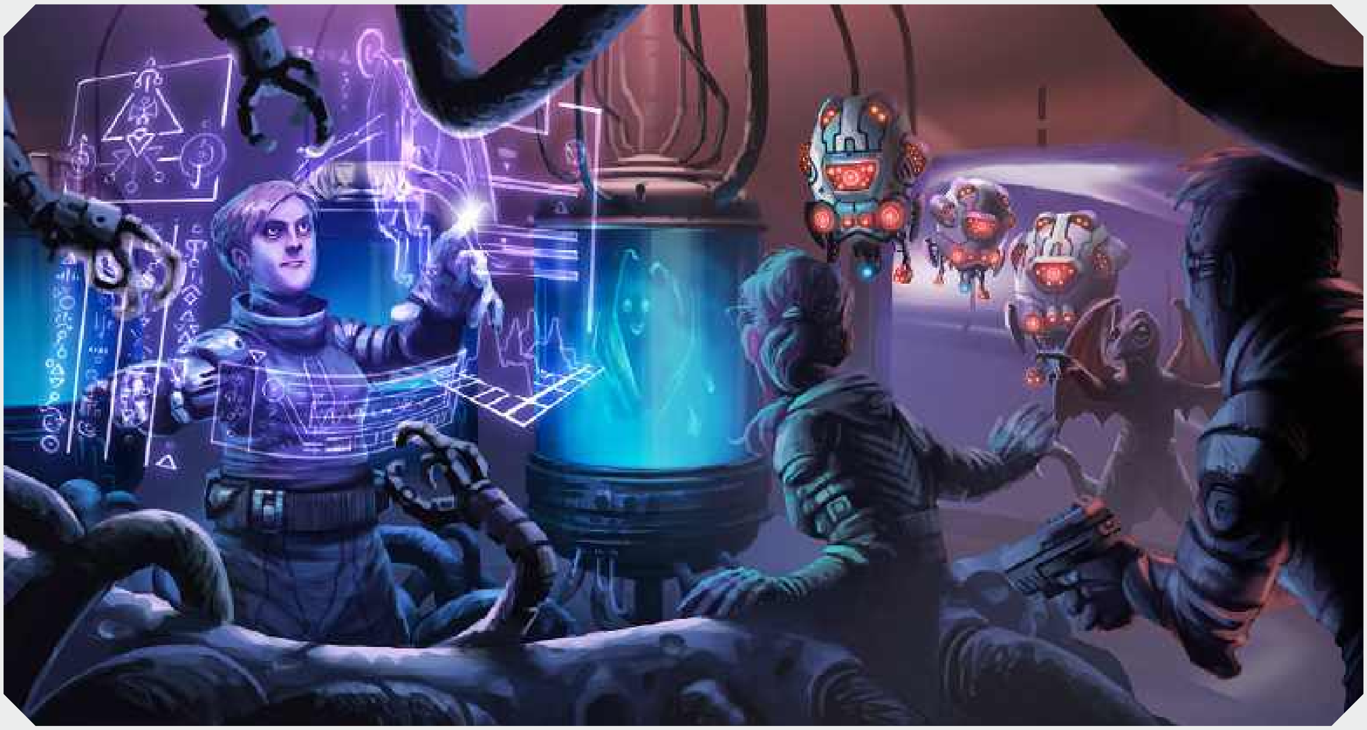
THE FAMILY ARCHIVE

Seven's archive is a spherical structure bisected by one of the floating platforms. There is a single entrance consisting of an iris hatch that leads to a tunnel and the tunnel leads to the centre of the Archive. Outside the iris hatch is a pair of scourge machines. The Travellers can either sneak past or attack the machines, which are under orders to attack any intruders.

Inside the Archive, Grandfather takes complete control of his Host's body. *'This way!'* he orders the Travellers, leading them down into the heart of the Archive.

Here, the Travellers find a spinning armature of light and psionic energy covered in Droyne glyphs. Grandfather begins to operate the controls. '*Hold them off!'* he snaps. '*I need to arrange it so Seven's consciousness downloads into his new body happens at just the right time. Also, hmm, yes. Excellent.'*

His hands move over the controls with lightning speed and then he is lifted into the spinning machine. He sits cross-legged, communing with the device.



From outside, the Travellers hear approaching enemies. Seven's followers cannot risk damaging the Archive, so cannot deploy heavy weapons. The Travellers are attacked by waves of assassin drones and Droyne strike teams. All the while, Grandfather continues to operate the Family Archive.

One of the walls of the Archives opens, revealing a transparent cylinder. Floating in the cylinder is a newly-cloned Droyne body, identical to that worn by Grandfather when the Travellers first met him.

'*Nearly done'* says Grandfather. '*Just a quick psionic transfer and -'*

The Host suddenly finds themselves back in control of their body and falls out of the machine. Grandfather steps out of the cylinder. '*There we are, good as new. They were all clones of me, you know. Now, one last adjustment and we can depart.'*

The Droyne reaches out and touches the controls of the Family Archive again… and there is a flash of light as a previously undetected security system triggers. All the Travellers, including Grandfather, are knocked unconscious.

REUNION

The Travellers reawaken in weirdly familiar surroundings – they are in Vlen Backett's lodge back on Alell. More accurately, they are in an exact duplicate of it, created from Vlen's memories. The Travellers are still wearing their shimmersuits but all Ancients technology with them has been deactivated. Similarly, their disintegrator gauntlets have shut down. Any standard technology possessed by the Travellers still functions.

Vlen Backett stands before them. He looks remarkably healthy for a man whose body the Travellers brought home for burial all those months ago. He has a gauss pistol at his belt but carries a handful of wine glasses and a bottle of spacer's rum. His eyes are tired and haunted.

In a corner of the room is Grandfather, now inhabiting the cloned body he constructed in the Family Archive. There is a device resembling a black metal spider clamped to his head; this device is obviously paralysing him and inhibiting his psionic abilities.

This room is an exact duplicate of the lodge on Alell – attentive Travellers may remember important details like the closet full of weapons (see page 53), the computer system, the collection of fake identity papers and the secret passage that should lead to a cavern containing the *Star Hunter*.

HOMECOMING REDUX

Vlen greets the Travellers, especially the Inheritor. '*They rebuilt this place from my memories. It makes the transition to a new body easier. Dying's not easy, not even for me*.

'And it'll be a lot harder for you. The others wanted to kill you for helping Yaskoydray. I've convinced them to hold off until our master returns. He'll be reborn soon – your tampering wasn't enough to stop his rebirth. Which means we've got about 15 minutes to save your lives.'

Vlen explains the following:

- For more than 1,000 years, he has been a servant of the entity that the Travellers call Seven.
  - By the way, Yaskoydray has been lying to the Travellers all along. Yaskoydray did not build their civilisation single-handedly or clone Sons from his own genetic material. Seven was never a Droyne. The Droyne were just another experiment in creating a slave race, like the Vargr or humans.
- All this time, his duty has been to watch for signs of Ancients tampering with Humaniti. He has lived hundreds of lives. Part of his role includes recruiting other agents for his master. He had his eye on the Inheritor for years and intended to recruit them one day.
- He was killed back on Regina by his own servants to avoid Imperial investigation.
- Soon, the master will be reborn from the Family Archive.
- Seven's mind has survived the collapse of the pocket universe and will soon be reassembled in the Family Archive. Yaskoydray's tampering has been undone.
  - The Travellers were knocked unconscious by an emergency defence system that was keyed to detect advanced beings like Yaskoydray.

Do not monologue to the Travellers; let them ask questions or argue with Vlen.

When playing Vlen, emphasise his humanity. He may be

VLEN BACKETT

SPECIES	GENDER	AGE
Human	Male	Unknown

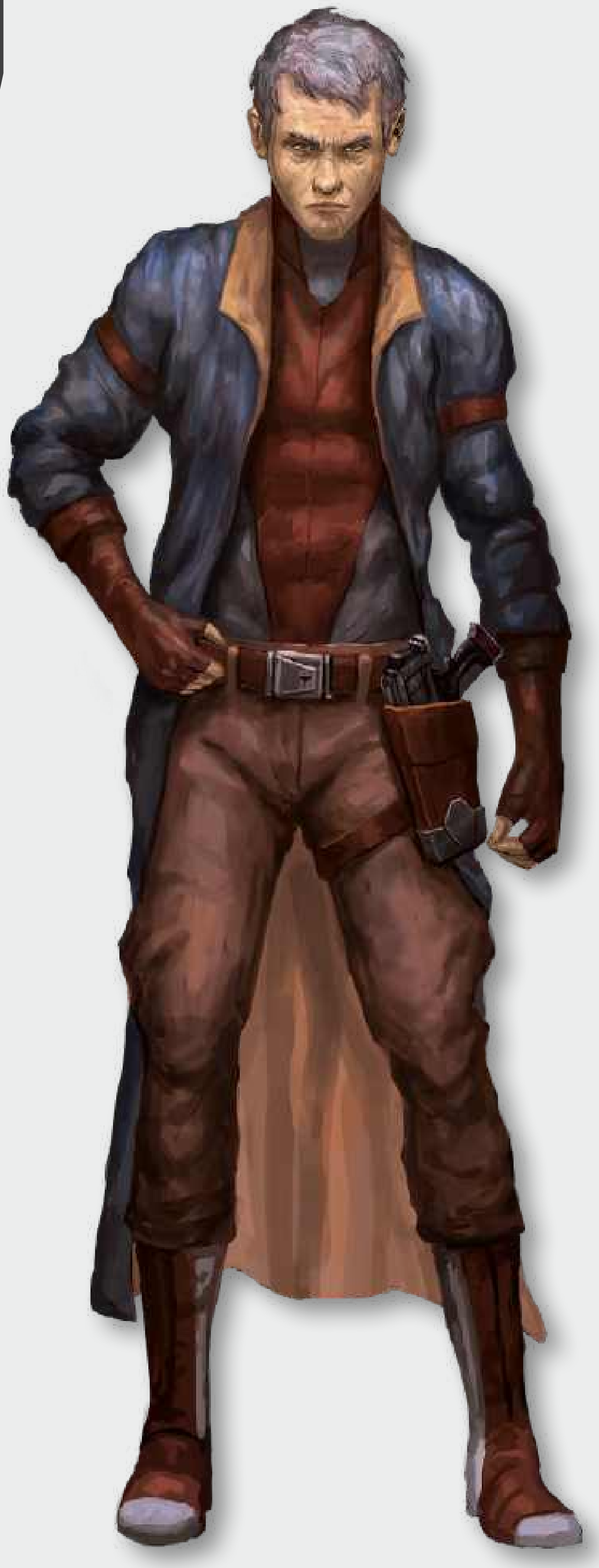
TRAITS			—	SKILLS
STR	10	INT	10	Advocate 1, Admin 1, Astrogation 2, Broker 2, Carouse 2, Deception 3, Diplomat 2, Drive 0, Electronics (comms) 1, Electronics (computers) 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (all) 3, Flyer (grav) 1, Gambler 2, Gun Combat (energy) 3, Investigate 2, Jack-of-all-Trades 2, Leadership 2, Mechanic 4, Medic 2, Navigation 1, Persuade 2, Pilot (spacecraft) 4, Stealth 4, Steward 2, Recon 3, Vacc Suit 2
DEX	12	EDU	14	
END	12	SOC	8	

EQUIPMENT	**Weapons:** Ancient Plasma Pistol (8D+8) **Armour:** Shimmersuit

WE SERVE THE MASTER

It is unlikely that any Travellers will change sides and join with Seven but if all the Travellers decide to take Vlen up on this offer, then you have a radically transformed *Traveller* campaign on your hands. When Seven returns, he can stabilise the star and prevent the star trigger from causing any more chaos. The reborn Ancient will then kill Grandfather (again).

The Travellers will become agents like Vlen. Their mission will be to destabilise the Imperium by whatever means possible, to weaken it in advance of Seven's conquest. Their first task is to engineer hostilities between the Imperium and the Zhodani. The Travellers will be equipped with advanced technology and provided with a ship, much like Vlen was. They are now super-augmented spies working for an Ancient. Good luck!



an immortal agent of a vengeful god but he is also the beloved eccentric uncle of one of the Travellers. Have him offer them a stiff drink; show them how tired and worried he is. He still genuinely cares about the Inheritor.

Once Vlen explains how he is still alive, he moves on to the question of the Travellers' future.

'Our master will soon return and when he does, this trickster is going to die slowly. You, though, you've got a choice. I can save your lives but you have to trust me.'

THE CHOICE

Vlen outlines Seven's goals and his own beliefs.

- The Ancient is going to take over Charted Space. The only thing stopping him doing so was the threat of other Ancients and Yaskoydray should be the last of them. In the next two decades, the master will conquer every system from the coreward reaches of the Consulate to the borders of the Solomani Sphere. Soon after that, he will conquer the other major races.
    - None of the races have the technology to stop the Ancients.
    - This is right and proper. The Ancients are a higher form of life. Humans and the other races are like pets to them. We are made to serve them. There is no shame in bowing to them, as a child must obey its parents.
- There are other threats in the galaxy and beyond. The Dyabyuse, for instance, are still out there. The master's instruments have detected a slow-moving psionic wave emanating from the heart of the galaxy, which might be their doing, or the work of the Primordials, a race that preceded even the Ancients.
    - The only way to survive these threats is to serve the Ancients. Only a galactic empire united under the master's reign will be able to resist such alien forces.
    - Life under the Ancients is not slavery. It is glorious! When Charted Space bows to the master, he will distribute his advanced technology. Those who serve him will be immortal. There will be no more suffering, no more poverty, no more war, no more injustice. The master will rule justly and kindly over his servants.
- Those who resist the master must be destroyed for the good of the galaxy. There can be no dissent, no doubt, no weakness. Any such hesitation would be a gift to the master's enemies.
    - Yaskoydray is no friend to the Travellers. He cares nothing for the other races; all he is interested in is his own scientific research. He would cheerfully sacrifice the Travellers or the whole Imperium just to obtain another data point for his experiments.
    - The Travellers visited Grandfather's domain, with his abandoned experiments and civilisations in bell jars and they have now seen how the master treats his followers. Which Ancient would they prefer to serve?

Now, the Travellers have a choice. If they completely and wholeheartedly agree to serve Seven, then Vlen will arrange for them to join the Ancient's followers. There can be no deception on this matter – Seven will probe their minds using psionic technology and lay bare their souls. If the Travellers try to deceive Seven, they will be destroyed along with Yaskoydray.

If they cannot bow to Seven, then Vlen will have no choice to execute them here and now.

What do the Travellers say?

NOVA TIME

While all this is going on, the Travellers' ship is still in orbit of Zoe and on board that ship is the star trigger device obtained in *The Dark Gate*. Before leaving the ship, Grandfather activated the trigger. It targets the protostar in the middle of the huge cavern; its initial effects were undetectable but now huge flares are building within the artificial sun.

Grandfather intended to be long gone before the star became unstable but he had not counted on the Family Archive's defences. Therefore, the first flare happens while the Travellers are in Vlen's lodge. The ground shakes, the lights flicker and there is a ghastly groaning noise from the surrounding buildings. An eerie red light floods the windows.

Vlen is momentarily distracted; if the Travellers are going to act, this is the moment. They can either tackle Vlen or grab a weapon and shoot him. If Vlen's Inheritor attacks, then Vlen surrenders and lets the Travellers kill him.

FREEING GRANDFATHER

Once Vlen is dead, the Travellers can remove the inhibitor device from Grandfather's head. The Ancient thanks them for their aid. '*We must return to the Archive! The star trigger will not nova for another few minutes and we must ensure Seven is not around to prevent it. Quickly!*'

Again, the Travellers need to find a way back to the platforms. As this is a perfect copy of the Lodge, there is indeed a secret passage underneath it leading to a hangar. Instead of the *Star Hunter*, however, the hangar contains a TL25 scout ship that looks like a silver dart – see *The Dart* on page 250. The Travellers can hijack this ship and use it to get to the Family Archive. Alternatively, Grandfather can fly them there using psionically-augmented strength or the Travellers can use Vlen's corpse to control the teleportals.

CITY IN CHAOS

Outside the Lodge, the City is in chaos. The solar flares are intense enough to disrupt the internal systems of the living buildings, so they grow at random, metastasising like cancer and spawning impossible architectures and sloughing off walls like snakeskin. The residents of the City are in a panic, especially the Vargr fanatics. The Droyne flee to bunkers underneath the City; they have prepared for thousands of years for an attack by another Ancient. Overhead, scourge machines and other robots circle in confusion, their delicate sensors scrambled by the flares. The Floating Platforms smash into each other, sending debris falling like meteors.

The City is being spared the worst effects of the star trigger for the moment. It is protected by a force shield which, for as long as it stands, reduces the damage caused by the flares. Outside the field, the cave walls melt to magma and slag under the assault. Gravity generators in the cave floor explode, restoring conventional gravity while streams of molten rock fall skyward.

This is the apocalyptic, everything-explodes scene of this campaign. Spend large chunks of your special effects budget here. Make the Travellers feel like the world is ending.

JUDGEMENT

Once the Travellers return to the Family Archive, Grandfather flits ahead of the group. '*I must delay Seven's resurrection!*' He enters the Archive.

While Grandfather is meddling with the Family Archive, the Travellers can be occupied with:

- Stealing a vehicle to escape the City
- Fighting off assassin drones
- Looting Ancients technology
- Trying to flee the City

CUT SCENES

Several parts of this adventure (especially Judgement) involve a lot of action on the part of other characters. The Referee has to describe Grandfather's struggle against the Family Archive, the slow reactivation of Seven, the chaos in the City and the impending supernova. In a video game, some of these events might be depicted in a non-interactive cut scene. In a tabletop roleplaying game, the Referee might be given boxed text to read to the Travellers.

Never read directly to the Travellers. Instead, take the suggested text and put it in your own words. Describe things round-by-round and always ask the Travellers what they are doing. They will not stand stock-still in mute witness to major events. Even if they have no obvious way to influence immediate events, the Travellers should still be the focus of the game.

For example, once the artificial sun is destabilised by the star trigger, the Travellers have no way to stop this happening or avert the devastation of the city. However, the Referee should keep the Travellers in the middle of the action by relating everything in terms of how it challenges them. Instead of reading a florid description of the solar flares and the damage to the City in a monologue, the Referee should ask the Travellers how they are taking shelter, ask for checks to dodge falling debris, note radiation exposure for Travellers not wearing shimmersuits and so on. Keep them involved at all times.

Again, the psionic defence system detects Grandfather's presence but this time he is ready for it. Grandfather struggles against the onslaught of the Family Archive and step-by-step, inch-by-inch, he drags his mutant form towards the control console. Any Traveller who approaches the Archive feels an agonisingly painful psychic pressure.

Above, the armature surrounding Seven's robot body begins to fall away. The Archive is active, uploading a copy of Seven's mind to its new form. The robot body twitches and quivers. Lights flicker along its flanks. Gun ports slide open and closed. On board, reactors come to life, sending the energy of a star surging through the ship.

Grandfather reaches the control console and makes his final adjustments. The Archive's frenetic activity slows to a crawl. In effect, the upload speed of Seven's mind has been throttled; the Ancient is still being reborn but at a much, much slower rate. Seven is trapped, half in the Archive and half in his new body, while the dying star wreaks havoc. Without Grandfather's tampering, Seven would have uploaded into its new body and escaped but now it is dying on a rack of solar flares and crippled data transfers.

ANOTHER CHOICE

Grandfather staggers out of the Archive. He is obviously utterly exhausted by his struggle with the Archive's defence mechanism. He reaches out a spindly claw towards the Travellers, begging them for help in this moment of weakness. Soon, Grandfather will recover. His mutant physiology, augmented by hundreds of thousands of years of technological, genetic and psionic manipulation, will swiftly restore his health. His unparalleled intellect will reassert itself and his psionic shields will be rebuilt. Soon, he will be a demigod again.

But right now, at this one instant of his triumph, he is uniquely vulnerable. Right now, he is just an exhausted and battered Droyne.

Any Travellers present have a choice. A single shot from a disintegrator gauntlet or gauss pistol could put an end to Yaskoydray. The Travellers could even just break his neck or throw him off the Floating Platform. He has no remaining Family Archive and lacks the strength to telepathically transfer his consciousness. The Travellers can kill Grandfather.

In this one moment, the Travellers control the fate of the galaxy.

THE DEATH OF SEVEN

Meanwhile, a second Ancient dies. For Seven, there is no escape, no hope of mercy. A solar flare licks out lazily from the disrupted star, blasting into the still-paralysed robot body. It is a testament to the incredible science of the Ancients that Seven survives the first flare. The radiation scars his robot form, the heat leaving his hull glowing white-hot, the kinetic force smashing his drives but he endures the first flare.

And the second. And the third. And the fourth.

OH MY GOD, YOU KILLED YASKOYDRAY

Old school Travellers may be alarmed at the thought of killing one of the most important figures in the entire *Traveller* universe; others may be positively gleeful at the idea. If you want to keep Grandfather alive despite the Travellers' murderous intent, nothing could be easier – assume that Grandfather has another secret Family Archive in another secret base. He only took refuge inside a human host to hide from Seven's agents – now that Seven is dealt with, he can reincarnate as himself in safety.

The fifth flare drives Seven into the cave wall like a ship driven onto a reef by a typhoon. The sixth cracks the ship from stem to stern, shattering the super-dense hull. Seven claws at space-time with relativity beams, trying to erect white globe shields, force screens and radiation dampers, but to no avail. The seventh flare strikes amidships and blasts the Ancient into cinders.

ESCAPE

While Ancients die, the Travellers still have to escape the City. The difficulty of this is up to the Referee; while it would normally be even harder to get out of Seven's base than it was to get in under these chaotic circumstances, the Referee may wish to bend plausibility to give the Travellers an easy exit from the exploding fortress.

- The Travellers can flee back to the starport and steal a ship, then fly up the shaft. Conveniently, the protective force bubble functions long enough to protect fleeing ships from the pressure of the ocean depths.
- For that matter, the shimmersuits can adjust their buoyancy. The Travellers can just float to the surface the same way they came in.
- If Grandfather is still alive and the Travellers protect him until he regains his strength, then he can teleport them to their ship in orbit.
- A merciful Referee might let the Travellers find a convenient teleportal to the surface in the midst of chaos.

Fortunately for the inhabitants of Zoe, the star trigger's chaos does not result in the protostar exploding. One of the flares destroys the Ancients machinery that

permits the star to exist in the first place and it gutters out in a burst of expanding hydrogen. The devastation sends a plume of heat rising through the ocean, wiping out all life in a 1,000-kilometre cone above the entry shaft. Earthquakes wrack the planet and a tsunami surge drowns the Vargr shoreline factories (incidentally liberating the enslaved sea-slugs).

Once the Travellers are back on the surface, they can obtain a ship or a shuttle to take them back to their own vessel in orbit. Again, if Grandfather is still alive, the Ancient can temporarily act freely and resolve almost any problem with the application of super-science or psionic mastery.

RETURN TO THE IMPERIUM

The return voyage to the Imperium is uneventful (unless Grandfather is still aboard, in which case see Inherit the Stars).

If the Travellers agreed to report to Imperial Intelligence for Arisa or Galen (see In The Emperor's Name), then they are met by an Imperial scout ship at Triad and escorted back to the Imperium. If they were acting as free agents throughout their recent adventures, then they can go where they wish after leaving Zoe.

INHERIT THE STARS

The Travellers' choices over the course of this campaign have changed the galaxy. The future course of their adventures will inevitably be affected by the passage of the Ancients.

THE REIGN OF SEVEN

If the Travellers sided with Seven and Vlen Backett against Grandfather, then your game has taken a turn for the apocalyptic. Without the threat of other Ancients to check him, Seven is virtually invincible. He may recruit the Travellers as agents alongside Vlen to prepare the galaxy for the invasion to come. Soon, his forces will emerge from Zoe and its other fortress worlds and overwhelm Charted Space. All sophonts will be forced to bow to the reborn Ancients Empire, ruled over by the immortal God-Emperor-Machine that was once Seven but is now referred to only as Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER DIES

If *both* Ancients perished, then the war of the Ancients is finally over. A conflict that lasted 300,000 years has finally come to an end – assuming, of course, that Seven and Yaskoydray were the only remaining survivors. Certainly, there are no other Ancients operating near Charted Space, which means that for the foreseeable future, Humaniti and the other major races are on their own. They can determine their own destiny – and that may be more dangerous than it first seems.

Both Grandfather and Seven had their own spy networks throughout Charted Space. Up until now, these spy networks have primarily gathered information about other Ancients but they have also tracked the development of new technologies. At times, they have even interceded to stop one race or another creating something dangerous. The Darrian *Maghiz*, for example, shows that the Imperium is on the verge of creating technologies that threaten the stars themselves. Without the invisible hand of the Ancients guiding Humaniti's development, it is possible that some bizarre new threat could be created by the Imperium or another stellar nation.

The death of Grandfather also throws the future of the Droyne race into doubt. Yaskoydray reintroduced the coyns to the Droyne comparatively recently, allowing them to caste again. Without Grandfather, are the Droyne doomed to decline further, degenerating first into a species of Chirpers and then into sub-sentient savages?

AGENTS OF YASKOYDRAY

If Grandfather survived and is on good terms with the Travellers, he may offer them a place in his retinue. Defeating Seven was a huge risk for Yaskoydray; to entrap Seven, Grandfather had to give up his pocket universe and risked his own existence. He needs to rebuild immediately – to establish a new base and a replacement Family Archive, as well as a whole new spy network, before he can restart his scientific research.

If the Travellers become Grandfather's agents, he gives them the same benefits as Seven gave Vlen Backett. They will be augmented using Ancients technology, making them effectively immortal, and equipped with gear suitable to their various missions. Sometimes, they will need the Ancients equivalent of battle dress and heavy weapons, and Grandfather will provide such deadly firepower but most of their missions will be covert ones. The Travellers' tasks will include:

- Finding a new secret base for Grandfather.
- Helping Grandfather with his experiments (especially when they go out of control).
- Scouring the galaxy for traces of surviving Ancients.
- Retrieving Ancients technology.
- Gathering information about the affairs of the Imperium, the Zhodani and the other great powers.
- Manipulating galactic events.
- Helping other agents and spies working for Grandfather.

ANCIENTS AUGMENTS

Those who serve the Ancients are given a suite of augmentations and upgrades that transform them into something much more powerful. Different agents are changed in different ways but the 'standard package', if such a thing can be said to exist, is as follows:

- STR+4, DEX+4, END+6, INT+2, EDU+4, PSI+4
- Natural armour Protection +5
- Automatic healing at the rate of one point per hour
- No natural ageing
- Ability to produce slow or fast drug from augmented glands
- All upgrades are concealed from detection; to most scans, the Traveller appears normal

This style of play is much more high-powered than normal Traveller play; the Travellers may still look like a scruffy band of free traders and mercenaries but they are the secret agents of a demigod and hold the lives of trillions in the balance.

GRANDFATHER'S FAREWELL

If Grandfather survived, but does not recruit the Travellers, then he vanishes from the campaign after Seven is defeated. The Travellers may simply never see Grandfather again if they were separated during the chaos on Zoe. Alternatively, if Grandfather escaped with them, he leaves the Travellers in jumpspace between Zoe and another planet. Their ship is in transit when they detect a bizarre distortion in the jump bubble. A bizarre ship pushes *through* the wall of jump bubble, defying everything that Humaniti understands about how the jump drive works and comes alongside their ship.

Yaskoydray bids them farewell. As a parting 'gift', he remotely disables the Travellers' shimmersuits and any other troublesome pieces of Ancients technology that might be problematic in future adventures. Grandfather explains that working examples of such technology would draw too much attention to the Travellers and their association with him. He needs to vanish into legend once more.

A kind Referee may have Grandfather offer them a reward. He might relate the location of an Ancients supply cache that is of no further use to him, awaken psionic abilities or give them another Ancients relic. Grandfather's gifts are always part of some greater scheme of his, so they will inevitably lead to further adventures.

For colder Referees, and for a Grandfather more in keeping with his portrayal earlier in the campaign, just have Yaskoydray depart once the Ancients ship arrives. The Travellers have served their purpose as his tools, so now he discards them without a moment's regret.

The Travellers will never see Grandfather again. He may depart from Charted Space entirely, withdrawing into another pocket universe to continue his research, or he may take a more active – but still undetectable – role in shaping the fate of the galaxy. Either way, the Ancient is done with the Travellers.

Unanswered Questions

- The Travellers have been on the run since they delivered Vlen Backett's corpse to Alell all those months ago. What is left of their former lives?
- If the Travellers escaped the Gash prison hulk, then they are wanted fugitives. Do they return to the Imperium or seek a new life in the Vargr Extents? If the Travellers want to buy the IISS off, they could trade some of their salvaged Ancients technology and the location of the Zoe base for a pardon.
- At this point, the Travellers know more secrets of the Ancients than anyone else – this would make them invaluable assets to the IISS, the University of Regina or anyone else with an interest in the Ancients. What will the Travellers do with these secrets?
- Through the acquisition of the G-band scanning equipment early in the campaign, do the Travellers truly have an easy Ancients site detecting mechanism? Is it capable of detecting only a certain type of Ancients site or was it only functional during this campaign because this was the time it was *supposed* to work?
- What becomes of the Zoe base? Most of Seven's technology has been reduced to molten slag but there could still be something worth salvaging in the ruins. If both the Vargr and the Imperium learn of the base, then Zoe could be a flashpoint for war.
- What of the rest of Seven's servants? Will they want revenge on the Travellers? Will they go renegade, using their Ancients-granted power to carve out their own empires?
- What was Seven's intent? Was the Ancient thirsty for power or was there some truth to his paranoid ramblings about the need to unite the galaxy? Are there unseen enemies out there that even the Ancients feared?
- How much of the history of the Ancients can the Travellers believe? Grandfather showed them one version of the rise and fall of the Ancients civilisation but if there is one thing that the Travellers should have learned by this point, it is that Grandfather lies. Even after all their adventures, do they really know the Secrets of the Ancients?

THE DART

TYPE: N/A

The Dart looks like an ovoid of silver metal when at rest; it reconfigures itself into a sharp-nosed dart when in flight. It is the Ancients equivalent of a scout ship. It has a jump drive but draws both power and hydrogen fuel from an onboard supply teleportal, so most of the ship's 100-ton mass is taken up with cargo space, staterooms and sensors. The ship is operated primarily using a psionic interface; it bonds with a primary pilot and responds to their thoughts while they are aboard.

TL25		TONS
Hull	100 tons, Streamlined, Radiation Shielding, Superior Stealth	—
Armour	Molecular Bonded, Armour: 15	7.5
M-Drive	Thrust 6	3
J-Drive	Jump-6	10
Power Plant	Teleportal	4
Fuel Tanks	J-6 (unlimited), indefinite operation	—
Bridge	Holographic Controls, Psionic Interface	10
Computer	Computer/50	—
Sensors	Very Advanced (DM+4) Enhanced Signal Processing Life Scanner Analysis Suite Military Countermeasures Suite	3 — — —
Weapons	Double Turret (particle beams, accurate, high yield)	1
Systems	Docking Space (20 tons) Launch Repair Drones	22 — 1
Software	Jump Control/6 Library Manoeuvre/0 Fire Control/3 Evade/3 Virtual Crew/2 Auto-Repair/2	— — — — — — —
Staterooms	Standard x6	24
Common Areas		6
Cargo		8.5

Crew:

Pilot

Hull: 40

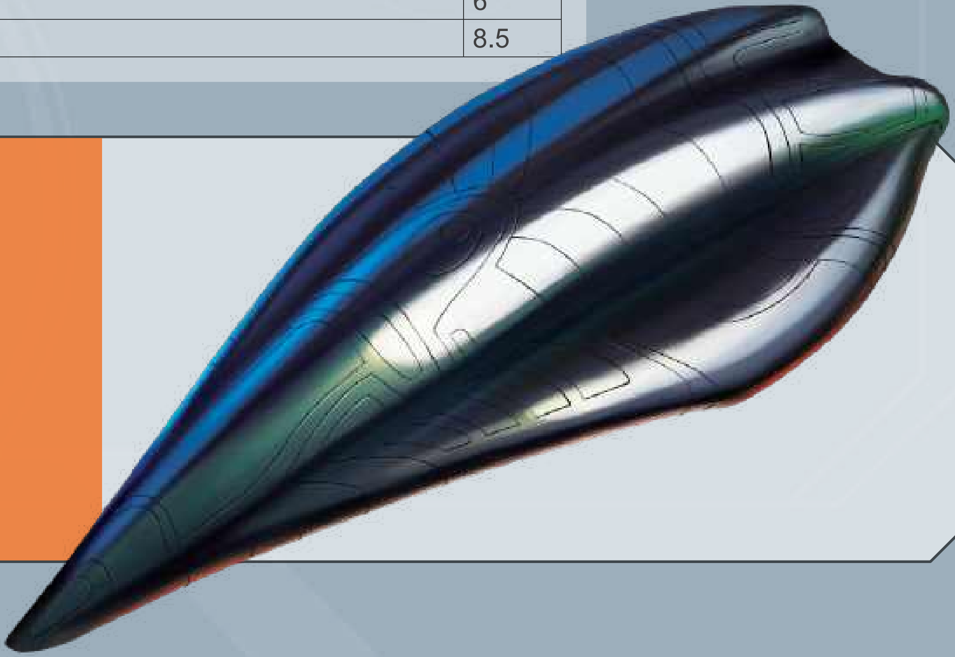
Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr0/month

PURCHASE COST

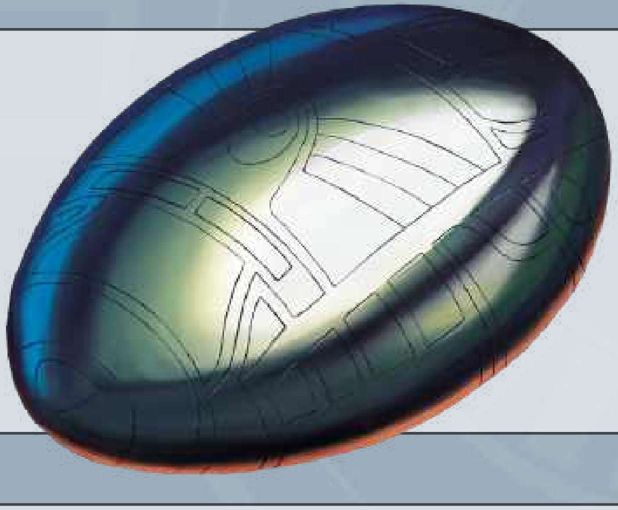
Priceless

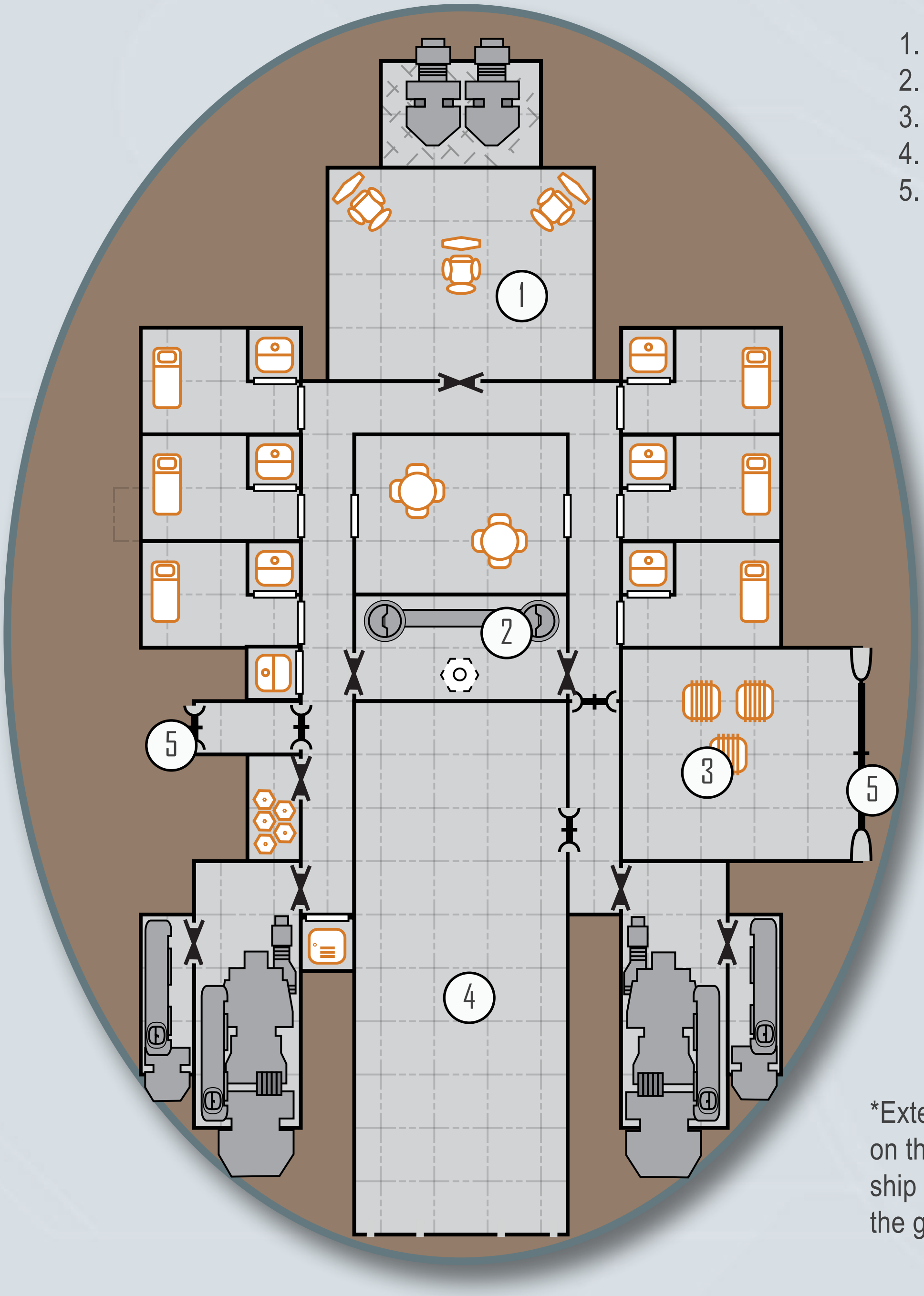


The Dart (in flight)

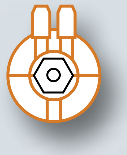
The Dart

(at rest)





1. Bridge
2. Teleportal
3. Cargo Bay
4. Launch Docking Bay
5. External Airlock*



*External airlocks open on the underside of the ship and form ramps to the ground

LIBRARY DATA

40th Squadron: The 40th Squadron is one of the best-organised Vargr bands in Gvurrdon. They are descended from a squadron of Vargr warships that survived the First Frontier War and established their own petty kingdom in the chaotic aftermath of the conflict. The 40th controls a loose alliance of a half-dozen systems. Individual planets have their own governments but the 40th Squadron's naval officers are the real power in the empire. The 40th lacks the resources to maintain its full fleet without external help; in the past, the Zhodani have propped them up to threaten the Imperium's flank.

Alell: Originally settled by the descendants of hotel staff, Alell has become a rich and influential world despite its extremely dangerous native wildlife. The population is clustered into a small number of fortified cities, although modern technology makes it possible to live in more rural areas. Alell's primary industry is tourism; secondary exports include wood, furs, pharmaceuticals and other material harvested from the jungles that cover 30% of the planet's surface area. Alell has a Class B starport whose original structure dates back to the First Imperium and is considered an excellent example of fin-de-siecle Vilani design.

Ancients: Colloquial name for a species of aliens that lived 300,000 years ago. Comparatively little is known about the Ancients. They are believed to be responsible for transplanting Humaniti from its original homeworld of Terra (see Solomani Hypothesis) and scattering the species across hundreds of planets. They are also believed to have uplifted the Vargr from Terran canines. The Ancients had an exceedingly high level of technology and many of their artefacts are millennia beyond even cutting-edge Imperial science. Estimates of high end Ancients technology place them beyond TL25.

Several Ancients sites have been discovered across Charted Space, especially in the Spinward Marches. Curiously, the technology at these sites varies considerably, suggesting different Ancients groups pursued radically different paths of development. Furthermore, most Ancients sites show signs of damage consistent with orbital bombardment or other violence; there are also anomalies in other systems that can be explained only by the use of weapons that destroyed entire planets. These facts, coupled with the sudden disappearance of the Ancients from known space, have given rise to Ancients Extinction Theories.

Ancients Extinction Theories: The Ancient race vanished abruptly some 300,000 years ago. This sudden extinction is a mystery to archaeologists, who have developed several competing theories to explain it. Mainstream theories are divided along two axes – the Heterogenous/Homogenous axis and the Catastrophist/Gradual Decline axis. The Homogenous Ancients school believes there was a single Ancients culture that expanded and then vanished; the Heterogenous school argues there were multiple competing cultures or a series of empires, or even multiple races that achieved high technology levels in the Ancients time period. The Homogenous theories explain the similarities between Ancients sites, commonalities in architecture, the use of Droyne as pets or servants and so forth. The Heterogenous theories seek to explain the wild variations in Ancients technology and architecture, the lack of any clear structure to Ancients territory and the sudden end of their civilisation.

The Catastrophists hold that a single terrible event ended the Ancients hegemony. Various candidate apocalypses have been advanced; Homogenous Catastrophists point to disease, a hostile alien race or a strange accident that wiped out Ancients civilisation. Heterogenous Catastrophists also suggest a civil war could explain the sudden disappearance. Gradual Declinists argue that a super-civilisation would be more robust and that the Ancients must have slowly declined in vitality and viability over a period of millennia.

Assumption of Custody: Under Regina law, the Public Order Commission has the power to detain suspects for up to a month without trial. Assumption of Custody is a process where multiple suspects of a crime are detained and questioned; these 'suspects' might just have been in the area of the crime, or match a profile, or even be randomly swept off the streets. Those Assumed into custody are innocent until proven guilty. Assumption is held to be a civic service and while a small stipend is available to those who are Assumed, it can still cause considerable inconvenience. Critics of the policy note that most citizens of Regina are never Assumed but certain groups – known criminals, transients, uneducated youths, Travellers – are regularly detained by the POC.

Beck's World: Former pirate base. Beck's World is a volcanic wilderness with a minimal biosphere and few natural resources.

Boughene: A scout base is established at Boughene, as part of the continued surveying operations coreward and spinward of the Imperium. There is little else in the system of interest to Travellers; the scout base is not open to visitors.

Brotherhood of Humaniti: A quasi-religious group that arose following the confirmation of the Solomani Hypothesis that all Humaniti stems from a single source. The Brotherhood believes that all humans should come together as one species, united under a common government. As such, any government or institution that opposes such radical unity is an enemy of the species and must be destroyed. Since its inception, the Brotherhood has moved towards mysticism, attributing increasingly unlikely supernatural powers to 'true Humaniti', the ur-race that was destroyed when the Ancients divided Humaniti into different 'tribes'.

Cadgeree: The cadgeree resembles a winged snake with a spiked tail. Cadgeree are extremely effective predators, who attack by hurling themselves down on prey from a great height, embedding their tail spikes deep into the target's flesh. The serpent then thrashes wildly, snapping the spine of its victim with ease. Cadgeree usually attack smaller creatures but have been known to attack humans when hungry.

Church of the Chosen Ones: A Vargr religious sect who believes Vargr are the chosen heirs of the Ancients and therefore the rightful rulers of the galaxy. The Church was at its height some 200 years ago and today is more of a fringe cult.

Credo: Capital city of Regina, with a population of 87 million. Located on the eastern edge of the continent of Noncredo. Credo prides itself on its cosmopolitanism – it has a high transient population, including many visitors from the Core worlds. Fashion and culture on Credo are heavily influenced by these visitors, leading to tension between Credo and more traditional cities on Regina. The city is sometimes called 'little Capital', a mocking reference to Credo's mimicry of Imperial high culture. Despite its cultural pretensions, the curious and strict legal system of Regina is still in effect here – laws must be voted on by the entire population and the justice system is as bureaucratic as it is enthusiastic, without being efficient at either. See Public Order Commission.

Dandelion: See Llellewyoly.

Dancado: Forested region north of Credo City; private property of the Duke of Regina.

Efate: With its high Tech Level and population, Efate is almost as influential as Regina. It is a major crossroads for trade and Imperial naval operations – the 213th fleet is headquartered here. Visitors to Efate are cautioned that local customs and cultures are prone to change over short periods and that the pace of life here is uncomfortable to many. To quote the Efate tourist board – live fast, die young, get resurrected by our advanced medical technology.

Feri: Travellers are advised that a civil war is underway on Feri and the world has a provisional Amber classification. The starport is under Imperial protection but other regions are subject to unpredictable violence.

Hos (Staff): Term used to denote an inferior or servant in Alell culture; derived from old Vilani dialect term 'hos'ai', servant or staff used in the catering industry.

Kaldi Research: Kaldi is a private corporation with two main branches. The bulk of Kaldi's assets are employed in fixed installations that undertake research on contract for corporate bodies and planetary governments. A much smaller proportion of Kaldi's effort is placed into the operation of a number of laboratory ships that travel throughout the Marches and beyond, either hiring out their services to whomever needs a general research team or engaging in ongoing studies.

Knorbes: Knorbes is an Imperial game reserve; hunting permits are available to citizens of excellent standing from the starport. Visitors are advised that Knorbes is a technologically restricted zone and permits are required to use any advanced technology outside the confines of the starport.

Lagrangian Point: One of five points in a three-body orbital configuration where a small object affected only by gravity will be stationary relative to the two larger bodies. In the Assiniboia system with its multiple moons, there are several semi-stable points.

Lambdragon: Large herbivore common to the Alell jungles. Lambdragons slowly graze through the forest, eating from the treetops. They have few natural predators, due to their size and the protection of the pack. The term 'lambdragon' was given to them because of their perceived gentleness but attacks by lambdragons are not impossible. The creatures have surprisingly sharp teeth for a herbivore (more accurately, they have two sets of teeth – an exterior set of flat teeth for feeding on leaves and a retractable set of sharper teeth used in defence and mating rituals) and a stampede of lambdragons can flatten a tank.

The creatures reproduce by depositing egg sacs in hollows in trees. The larval lambdragon feeds on the interior of the tree and 'hatches' when the weakened tree collapses. The passage of a large herd of lambdragons can cause sizable seismic tremors, causing trees to fall and thus bring new dragons into the herd.

Llellewyoly: The Llellewyoly are a minor race native to Junidy in the Aramis subsector of the Spinward Marches. They are nicknamed 'Dandelions' or 'Dandies', as they resemble a two-metre-tall version of a Terran plant, with five stalk-like limbs that are used for manipulation, movement and sensing. Llellewyoly are highly intelligent and have excellent memory recall and organisational skills, possibly as a result of their incredibly complex social structure. A Llellewyoly possesses dozens of formal titles simultaneously and addressing it by the wrong title is a grievous insult. They are rarely encountered outside their homeworld.

Maleficent: Infamous and mysterious predators of the Alell jungles, maleficents are fast and brutal creatures. They are jet-black in colour, although markings can be seen under ultraviolet light. They travel through the trees by means of tentacles, snaking along the canopy in search of prey. Little is known about their biology but some scientists believe they are not originally native to Alell.

Menorb: An unremarkable agricultural planet, known mainly for producing food for export to the Vargr market. Unfortunately, this has drawn more than its share of raiders, who snack on Menorb before moving on to more profitable targets.

Oyntrip: A Droyne unit of social organisation, ranging in size from a handful of individuals to the population of a whole planet. Roughly cognate to a 'clan' or 'nation'.

Pixie: The Pixie system is home to a forward operating base of the 213th Fleet. Travellers are requested not to travel to this system without due cause. The only civilian port is home to a small community of belt miners.

Public Order Commission: The local police force of Regina. The moon is Law Level 9, banning most personal weapons. Public Order Commission officers are also empowered to detain individuals or confiscate items that are judged to be 'disruptive or damaging to public order and safety'. In the past, this has been used to control technologies or restrict the movement of visitors to the moon. In practice, the POC is much more lenient in the most cosmopolitan cities; visitors to the less trafficked regions of Regina are advised to exercise caution.

Regina: The capital of the Regina subsector and seat of the Duchy of Regina, this is one of the most important worlds in the Spinward Marches. It is a bulwark against Zhodani aggression and the largest trade hub in the sector. Vessels travelling along the Spinward Main from the Core worlds often offload their cargoes at Regina, leaving smaller local traders to carry the goods on to the lesser systems. Regina Highport sees more traffic in a day than some lesser systems see in a decade.

Technically, Regina is a moon, not a planet; it orbits the gas giant Assiniboia, which itself orbits the locus of the primary star Lusor and its companion star Speck. There is a third star in the system, a red dwarf on a long eccentric orbit.

Regina Highport: This Class A starport is one of the largest ports in the entire sector. Over 80% of the cargo that passes through Regina is destined for other worlds in the sector, so most of the port is given over to cargo handling and warehousing. The port itself is located in geostationary orbit over Regina Downport and Startown, which is located halfway between the cities of Credo and Atora.

Roup: Roup is a water world. The only stable 'land' consists of synthetic islands grown from webs of micro-organisms and seaweed. These huge rafts support vast cities, factories, farmland and even the starport. Roup's citizens practice aquaculture on a planetary scale, with whole oceans sectioned off using bubble-nets to maximise productivity.

Rynkatropa: The Rynkatropa are a minor race of sophonts who resemble ambulatory sea slugs. They have three pseudopods that they use to manipulate objects and move on land, and communicate by whistling. They have four sexes (male, female, neuter and incubator) and had just reached TL1 when they were enslaved by the Vargr.

Solomani Hypothesis: The theory that Humaniti originally evolved on the planet of Terra, the home of the Solomani. According to this theory, the Ancients transplanted primitive humans to other worlds in the galaxy, most notable the homeworlds of the Vilani and Zhodani. Genetic evidence has largely confirmed the Solomani Hypothesis, although some scientists and religious groups advocate other origins for Humaniti, such as parallel evolution or divine intervention.

Startown: The region around the old Regina starport, now the primary downport. This strip of bars, cheap hostelries, raucous entertainments and less savoury businesses is notoriously violent, corrupt and profitable. Technically, it is divided between the nearby cities of Credo and Atora; both blames the other for the state of Startown.

Siu (Guest): Term of respect used on Alell, derived from old Vilani dialect term 'Siu'ch', meaning guest or honoured visitor.

Tusal: Tusal is an illegal narcotic, usually sold in the form of tablets, although some prefer it in its less processed, undried form as a wad to be chewed. Tusal is derived from a seaweed. The origin of the drug is unknown but is believed to have been imported from the Vargr extents a century ago and is now grown on various worlds along the Corridor sector. A dose of tusal produces mild euphoria and intoxication; a very strong dose can dull pain receptors and cause unconsciousness. As a tusal user can remain functional while under the effects of a low dose, many addicts chew six or seven tablets per day to remain in a constant drugged haze. Tusal is especially associated with menial jobs and the unemployed, as an otherwise dull life of drudgery can be made pleasant by the drug. Long-term effects of tusal addiction include respiratory and digestive problems, and a high incidence of stomach cancer.

Uakye: Uakye is tidally locked, so all settlements are in the habitable 'twilight zone'. The planet is closely associated with Efate but Countess Parasii strongly affirms her planet's independence from the technocracy one system over.

University of Regina: Commonly used to refer to any of several prestigious academic institutions on Regina. Collectively, the University of Regina is the largest and most successful higher-level education and research facility in the Spinward Marches.

Whisperhawk: One of the most common sights in the jungle, whisperhawks are beautiful avians with prodigious wingspans. The hawk's wings are both locomotion and feeding organs – whisperhawks feed by digesting the insects that are caught on the sticky underside of the wings. A flock of hawks can glide across the jungle canopy at twilight, catching hundreds of thousands of insects as they fly. The buzzing of the trapped insects and the susurrus of the wind gives the whisperhawk its name.

They are notoriously stupid creatures and have been known to attack humans and vehicles (as well as flagposts, fences, houses and even small trees). If threatened, whisperhawks attack by wrapping their wings around a larger foe and trying to smother it.

Wochiers: The atmospheric pressure at sea level on Wochiers is more than four bars; the population therefore live in the mountains or in underground complexes. The high pressure makes Wochiers ideal for certain engineering projects, especially crystal growing. By tradition, all visitors to Wochiers must bring an offering of a living plant to the hydroponics caves; suitable plants are available in the starport gift shop.

Yres: The only surface structure on Yres is the entrance to the starport, which is an extremely impressive system of airlocks and tubes reaching from the surface to the seabed. The cities of this balkanised world are all underground and underwater. Visitors face an additional docking fee of Cr250, which is an obligatory donation to the Yres Reconstruction and War Widows Fund. The atmosphere is highly radioactive; iodine tablets are available from public dispensers throughout the cities.

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